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# Application of African-American feminist theory to Finnish women

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**Application of African-American Feminist Theory to**

**Finnish Women**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of Philosophy**

**San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Arts**

**by**

**Anu Arsalo**

**May 1996**

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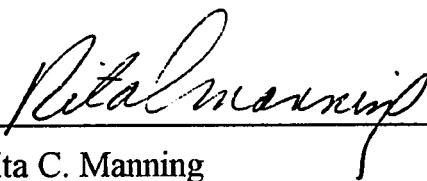
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## **ABSTRACT**

by Anu Arsalo

Black feminists have argued that traditional feminist theory has often been limited to concern about the patriarchal oppression of white, middle or upper class women. Women's oppression however is complex, and many problems cannot be eradicated by addressing only patriarchal domination.

This thesis discusses the black feminist concept of multiple jeopardy, and the connectedness of different forms of oppressions in a system of domination. As such black feminist theory is universal.

Like African-American women, Finnish women have not been able to relate to traditional feminist theory. Research shows that although Finland is part of Europe, its history has included both racist and colonial oppression and economic hardship. Taking into account the historical aspects of Finnish women's past, this thesis shows that black feminist theory is also applicable to Finnish women.



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# Chapter 1

## Black Women and Feminist Theory

### *Diversity of Views among Feminists*

#### **Traditional Feminist Views**

According to Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg, “Feminists are people who demonstrate a commitment to improving women’s position in society.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore all feminists generally agree on some fundamental issues concerning women, such as sexual harassment, rape, and abuse of women.<sup>2</sup> However, although the basic premises for feminist arguments are shared by feminists, there are several differing views presented as well.<sup>3</sup> Jaggar and Rothenberg divide feminist theories into five basic frameworks: Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Socialist Feminism, and Feminism by Women of Color. All the different feminist views are a response to conservative views, according to which women’s subordination is based on biology.<sup>4</sup> However, the approach and depth of the criticism of the conservative view is different among different feminists.

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1 Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg *Feminist Frameworks*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978) XII.

2 Jaggar and Rothenberg XIV.

3 Jaggar and Rothenberg XIV.

4 Jaggar and Rothenberg 85.

Liberal feminists do not attack the conservative views on the basis of biology, but rather they believe that regardless of the biological differences, women should not be denied equal opportunities with men. "For the liberal feminist," write Jaggar and Rothenberg, "the roots of women's oppression lie in women's lack of equal civil rights and equal educational opportunities."<sup>5</sup> Liberal feminists therefore believe that once sexist discrimination is abolished women are liberated.<sup>6</sup>

Marxist feminists on the other hand completely reject the argument that women and men are essentially different based on gender differences. They believe that women's discrimination is based on private ownership and in essence therefore represents a form of class oppression. According to this view, it is possible for some women to escape discrimination and climb up the capitalist hierarchy, but in order for all women to be liberated, the capitalist system must be overthrown.<sup>7</sup>

Radical feminists believe that women's oppression is the most fundamental of all forms of oppressions. Therefore they believe that understanding women's oppression provides an understanding of other forms of oppression as well.<sup>8</sup> The solutions to eradicating sex discrimination that radical feminists provide are often rather extreme. Firestone for example suggests support for technological developments that would relieve

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5 Jaggar and Rothenberg 85.

6 Jaggar and Rothenberg 85.

7 Jaggar and Rothenberg 85.

8 Jaggar and Rothenberg 86.

women from childbearing.<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Bunch believes that heterosexuality divides women and therefore inhibits them from battling sexual discrimination.<sup>10</sup>

Socialist feminists agree with traditional Marxists that human beings are fundamentally influenced by their material conditions; however, they claim that traditional Marxism does not take into account women's oppression within the class structure. Jaggar and Rothenberg write, "Thus, socialist feminists accept the radical feminist insight that women's oppression is at least partially rooted in the so-called personal sphere, and they attempt to incorporate this insight within the conceptual framework provided by historical materialism"<sup>11</sup> Socialist feminists therefore consider both radical feminist theory and traditional Marxism inadequate for eradicating different forms of oppression that women suffer.

### **Feminism and Cultural Differences**

Women of color are simultaneously oppressed by racism and sexism. They also often face economic hardship and obstacles arising from a class based economic system. All the previously defined feminist frameworks fail to discuss racist oppression as an intricate part of women's oppression. Therefore they are inadequate to eradicate the forms of oppression women of color have to struggle against. Women of color have

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<sup>9</sup> Jaggar and Rothenberg 86.

<sup>10</sup> Jaggar and Rothenberg 87.

<sup>11</sup> Jaggar and Rothenberg 87.

revealed the bias of feminist theories and concerns toward the experiences of white, middle-class women. Jaggar and Rothenberg write:

At the beginning of the contemporary feminist movement, for instance, feminists engaged in a much-needed struggle for the right of women to obtain safe and legal abortions, but for a long time the women's movement remained oblivious to the plight of many women of color who were, and are, struggling against compulsory sterilization and for the right to conceive and bear children without the fear of poverty and degradation.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, while white middle class women addressed their own oppression, they failed to notice how women around them were oppressed. They also failed to take into consideration differing views. They arrogantly took their own experiences to include all women and thus they actually continued in the tradition which they had indeed intended to criticize.

I strongly agree with the criticism of feminist views that women of color have presented. Women's experiences and consequently their oppression can not be universally categorized. Several experiences influence how women are oppressed, if indeed they are oppressed. These experiences include, for example, racial, national and/or tribal identities, the roles of women in any given culture, and the meanings of these roles. The flexibility of the roles of both men and women is also influential. Woman's role as a breadwinner for example does not necessarily mean liberation and on the other hand being a full-time mother does not necessarily mean that a woman is oppressed.

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<sup>12</sup> Jaggar and Rothenberg 89.

In the following section I will discuss the circumstances of African-American women and how their circumstances have not been taken into account by traditional feminists, nor by most civil rights activists. Black feminists have called attention to the oppression that African-American women face as a result of the multiple jeopardy factor of being a minority woman. Black feminists have brought to our attention that racism, sexism and classism are three forms of oppression, interconnected in ways that require simultaneous address, in order for women to be free.

In this thesis, I will refer to the feminist movements and theories that have exhibited racial bias as traditional feminism. This will include the early feminist movement and the second wave feminist movement. I will refer to current feminist theories as contemporary feminism to separate them from the early and second wave feminism.

## ***The Problem with Traditional Feminism***

### **The Roots of Women's Rights**

Since its beginning, the women's movement has been closely connected with the civil rights struggle. "White women, encountering the oppression of blacks, faced the reality of their own lives in servitude to their fathers and husbands," writes Elizabeth F. Hood in her article "Black Women, White Women: Separate Paths to Liberation."<sup>13</sup> Being part of the same social system based on domination by wealthy white men, white

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Hood, "Black Women, White Women: Separate Paths to Liberation" Jaggar and Rothenberg 192.

women were influenced by the same kinds of issues as African-Americans, but it took the abolitionist movement to raise the consciousness of white women about their own limited place within the male dominated social structure. White women's anti-slavery work thus led them to struggle for women's rights. When women members of the American delegation to the World Anti-Slavery Convention at 1840 were excluded from participating at the convention, the seed was planted to hold a conference to advance women's rights. As a result the struggle for women's rights formally began with Seneca Falls Convention in 1848.<sup>14</sup>

Black women were actively involved in the women's movement since its beginning. Women's suffrage for example, was an issue that black and white women worked on together. Sojourner Truth, a black women's rights advocate for instance, spoke publicly for women's rights, including suffrage. According to Elizabeth Hood, Truth was not only a suffrage activist, but she also served as a role model for the white female leaders.<sup>15</sup>

### **Black Women, White Women; Different Needs**

The participation of African-American women in the feminist movement was only natural considering the oppression that they were subjected to. "19<sup>th</sup> century black women were more aware of sexist oppression than any other female group in American

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<sup>14</sup> Pauli Murray, "The Liberation of Black Women" Words of Fire, ed. Guy-Sheftall (B. New York: The New Press, 1995) 191.

<sup>15</sup> Hood 193.

society has ever been,” writes bell hooks.<sup>16</sup> Black women were subordinated as women by the patriarchal society, and they faced racist oppression as people of color.

However, the combination of the oppression that black women faced placed them in a position where their need to end oppression differed from white women. As a result, it was clear from early on that there were issues that pertained to the women of one race but not the other.

One such difference was that white women needed convincing that political activism was not contradictory to domestic work. Black women on the other hand did not find conflict in being politically active and fulfilling their role as women as they understood it.<sup>17</sup> Maria Stewart for example, combined her highly religious views with strong advocacy of civil rights and women’s rights. Her views combined both Victorian values and criticism of those values. She was the first American woman to give public speeches on political themes.<sup>18</sup> Even if she advocated traditional women’s roles to a certain extent, her actions nevertheless placed these roles in question. According to Paula Giddings, Maria Stewart even expressed feminist ideas before any white woman, such as Sarah Grimke. Yet Sarah Grimke is one who is generally considered “providing the first rationale for American women’s political activism.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> bell hooks, Ain’t I a Woman, Black Women and Feminism (Boston: South End Press, 1981) 161.

<sup>17</sup> Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1984) 52.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Stewart, Essays and Speeches, ed. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) viii.

<sup>19</sup> Giddings 50.



The question of women's physical capabilities was also an issue that concerned white and black women differently. White bourgeois women represented the epitome of womanhood." According to the stereotype that was constructed of white middle and upper class women they were on a pedestal. This conception of womanhood included characteristics such as submissiveness, dependency, purity, chastity and physical weakness. The stereotype of white women as incapable of caring for themselves gave white men better control over the activities and lives of their women. It was this stereotype of women that the women's movement now began to question and dismantle.

Black women had never been on a pedestal, and therefore they did not need to be convinced of the falsehood of the supposedly essential female characteristics of this particular stereotype. The physical appearance of black women did not fit the mold of the female beauty by the dominant society. Other supposedly feminine attributes did not apply to black women either. For instance, while white women were considered physically weak and incapable of physical labor; black women were expected to be engaged in physically demanding labor. This is another example of the racism black women were subjected to, but it had positive consequences as well. Because black women were forced to push their physical capabilities to their limits, they were more aware of their physical abilities than white women were and as a result physical strength for black women did not contradict being a women. Granted, most white women in reality did not fit the stereotype either, but in the eyes of the society all white women were expected to fit the stereotype. The stereotype was about white women, not about black women. Sojourner

Truth's exclamation "Ain't I a woman," as she bared her breasts in a women's right's convention at 1852, well demonstrates this point. Speaking from a personal experience, Truth described the physically demanding circumstances of black women.<sup>20</sup>

Although black and white women shared the beginnings of the women's rights movement, the issues that separated black and white women quickly became insurmountable. In addition to their different interests, white women's racism, and their unwillingness to pay attention to black women's concerns deepened the separation. At several occasions white women used black women to further their gains and then turned their backs on black women when that seemed advantageous. For example, white women used black women's support on the suffrage issue. The Fifteenth Amendment would have given black men, but not women, the right to vote. Instead of recognizing blacks as their natural allies against a common oppressor, women found themselves in competition with them. Despite Elizabeth Cady Stanton's attempts to win the support of black women, she did not hesitate to exhibit her own racial prejudices. "The Republican cry of 'Manhood Suffrage' creates antagonism between black men and all women that will culminate in fearful outrages on womanhood."<sup>21</sup> This shows how oblivious she was to the plight of black women.

Again a half century later, white women were interested in the support of black women in order to gain universal suffrage. However, once the so-called Anthony

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<sup>20</sup> hooks 160.

<sup>21</sup> Giddings 55.

Amendment had passed the House and was stuck in the Senate in 1919, white women were eager to allow adjustments to be made in the Amendment that would have enabled states to enact racial restrictions on voting. When the NAACP requested Carrie Chapman Catt, the president of NAWSA (National American Women's Suffrage Association), to state where NAWSA stood on this issue, she stated, "We stand for the removal of the sex restriction, nothing more, nothing less."<sup>22</sup>

By the time of the second wave feminist movement, yet another half century later, black women were so mistrustful of white women that few even attempted to work with white women anymore. Added to this was the fact that white women still had so much racism to deal with amongst themselves that they continued to remain insensitive to black women's concerns. They also lacked an understanding of their own oppression to the point that they were unable to learn from black women.<sup>23</sup>

## ***Multiple Jeopardy***

### **Interconnected Oppression**

For black women from early on the struggle against racism, and often against economic oppression, was inseparable from the struggle against male dominance. On the one hand black women's oppression parallels white women's oppression; on the other hand it parallels black man's oppression. Yet certain dimensions of black women's

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<sup>22</sup> Giddings 163.

<sup>23</sup> Giddings 307.

oppression are the consequence of the combination of racist and sexist oppression. For example since racism has denied black men equal economic opportunities with white men, black women have been forced to work. However, because of their race and gender, job opportunities for black women were limited.

It is not very difficult to recognize the connected nature of racism and sexism in the case of black women. It is harder to recognize that racism and sexism are interconnected in ways that touch all of those who are oppressed. I agree with black feminists that this is the case though. First of all, racism and sexism are part of the same social structure of domination, in which wealthy white men hold the power. The slave system provides a good example of this. "White southern women," writes Paula Giddings, "found themselves enmeshed in an interracial web in which wives, children, and slaves were *all* expected to obey the patriarchal head of the household."<sup>24</sup> It was believed that to question or change any part of the power structure would result in ruin of the society, including family.<sup>25</sup>

Similar psychological and social forms of oppression have been used on the basis of race and gender to gain or maintain the power in the hands of white men. For example, during the 1660's a law was enacted according to which a child born to a slave became a slave, regardless of the status of the father. In the same year, another law was passed. According to this law an indentured servant woman who became pregnant was to be

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<sup>24</sup> Giddings 43.

<sup>25</sup> Giddings 43.

“‘sold’ to the church wardens, who would employ her in the tobacco fields” for two years.<sup>26</sup> In Maryland white women were discouraged from marrying black men, by forcing them into slavery for the lifetime of their husbands. As a result of this law, there were instances where white women were “sold” into slavery by forcing them to marry black men. This law was later revoked.<sup>27</sup>

The oppressor can only share his power with those who can assimilate to the point where he can identify with the other. That is how previously oppressed immigrant groups have assimilated to mainstream USA. People who greatly differ from the oppressor will never be able to assimilate even if they want to. The oppressor will yield his power at his will, but he will never share his power. Consequently, it may seem that equality is achievable, when in reality it really isn't. This would explain why women and blacks still fall behind white men in opportunities like better paying jobs, although they have made significant civil rights gains in recent years. Since the oppressor does not share his power, he can threaten the rights that blacks or women have managed to achieve. An example of this is the recent threat for women in Finland of losing the social benefits that have allowed women to fully participate in the Finnish society. The same phenomena can be seen in the rhetoric of the far right groups in the USA, which blames women, minorities and immigrants for all the social problems present in the US society.

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<sup>26</sup> Giddings 37.

<sup>27</sup> Giddings 38.

In order to eradicate sexism and racism, it is important to abolish the underlying structure that fosters oppression. Seeing women's rights as only an issue of sexism is not enough because, even if white middle-class women were not interested in sharing power with black women, they will not be able to share power with men either. The same applies to civil rights. Black men can share power with white men only to the point that white men allow this to happen.

### **Black Women's Awareness**

In the introduction of her book When and Where I Enter Paula Giddings discusses the general awareness of black women to the interconnectedness of racial and sexual oppression. She writes:

In the course of my research, several themes emerged. One of them, clearly exposed through the experience of Black women, is the relationship between sexism and racism. Because both are motivated by similar economic, social, and psychological forces, it is only logical that those who sought to undermine Blacks were also the most virulent antifeminists. The means of oppression differed across race and sex lines, but the wellspring of that oppression was the same. Black women understood this dynamic. White women, by and large, did not. White feminists often acquiesced to racist ideology, undermining their own cause in doing so. For just as there is a relationship between racism and sexism, there is also a connection between the advance of Blacks and that of women. The greatest gains made by women have come in the wake of strident Black demand for their rights.<sup>28</sup>

Anna Julia Cooper recognized the form that the combined effect of racism and sexism poses on black women at the turn of the century. She said: "She [a black woman]

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<sup>28</sup> Giddings 6.

is confronted by a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or unacknowledged factor in both.”<sup>29</sup>

Harriet Jacobs also discusses in her autobiographical novel Incidents in a Life of a Slave Girl the specific form of oppression faced by black women during slavery. “Slavery is terrible for men,” she wrote, “but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own.”<sup>30</sup> Jacobs refers to sexual abuse by the slave masters, as well as lack of control over raising one’s children.

Deborah K. King calls the multitude of oppression multiple jeopardy. She argues that when one is subjected to several forms of oppression, the result is different from when the different forms of oppression are added to one another. The multiple jeopardy thus produces specific forms of oppression, not faced by white women nor black men.

Black women on the one hand are oppressed as black people and as women, while on the other hand they have been ignored by most male civil rights activists and by most white feminists. They also face oppression that is specific to being black and a woman.

### **Strong Black Women**

According to Pauli Murray, the greatest achievement of black women has been survival.<sup>31</sup> In order to survive, black women have been forced to rely on themselves and

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<sup>29</sup> Giddings 166.

<sup>30</sup> Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in a Life of a Slave Girl. Early African-American Classiscs (New York: Bantam Books, 1990, first published 1861) 177.

<sup>31</sup> Murray 186.

be independent. On the one hand they have had to provide or substantially supplement family income, and on the other hand the black community has needed the full participation of all its members.<sup>32</sup> According to Murray, sociologist Franklin Frazier considered these characteristics a foundation for egalitarian relationships between men and women.<sup>33</sup> Based on this purported equality, the existence of sexist oppression in the black community has questioned.

Sociologist Daniel Moynihan went so far as to practically accuse black women of oppressing black men. He blamed the social ills such as a proportionately high number of father absent households and the resulting poverty on the family structure. Moynihan considered the black family structure, in which women had too much power, the legacy of slavery. According to him, slave families were understood as matriarchal, which in turn has emasculated the black man. He linked lack of *healthy masculine power* in his own home to contemporary problems of violence and poverty in the inner-city black community.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the equality between men and women among African-Americans can be questioned. Not only during slavery, but also during sharecropping, these women performed traditionally masculine labor, which has been taken to indicate equality. However, since men did not engage in traditionally female work, the sexual division of

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<sup>32</sup> Murray 186.

<sup>33</sup> Murray 186.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Moynihan, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C, 1965. Reprinted in Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967) 39-132.



labor was present.<sup>35</sup> In fact, to make a slave man perform women's work was used as a form of punishment.<sup>36</sup> This division was extended to the black families. Women were responsible for the children and performed domestic work, after having already worked the same amount of hours as men, and often performing the same, equally demanding tasks.

A sexual division of labor, however, does not necessarily mean that one sex is dominated by the other. If slave women willingly performed housework in their own households because it manifested some form of control over their own lives, can they be considered oppressed by men? Most 19th century women, black and white, performed domestic work willingly and without questioning their role. The women's movement has brought gender roles into question, and closer scrutiny has revealed the oppressive nature of the patriarchal system and gender roles based on it. The division of labor and consequent gender roles among African-Americans since the time of slavery were an adaptation of the patriarchal male domination of the white society. It appears then that if in fact black men have been demasculinized by the society's standards, the reason has not been non-existent gender roles. Instead racist attitudes have first prohibited black men from carrying out the gender roles and subordinating women to the same extent as white men. As black men have not been able to behave according to what white society has considered a norm for a man, black men have been considered to be effeminate. It is

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<sup>35</sup> Susan A Mann, "Slavery, Sharecropping, and Sexual Inequality" *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 4, Summer 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Mann. "Slavery, Sharecropping, and Sexual Inequality."

unfortunate then that African-Americans have bought into the stereotype of matriarchal women and demasculinized men. As a result one of the reasons for sexism in the black community is the adaptation of the patriarchal gender roles of the white culture. Pauli Murray points this out:

The black militant's cry for the retrieval of black manhood suggests dominance, and a tendency to treat the values of self-reliance and independence as purely masculine traits. Thus, while blacks generally have recognized the fusion of white supremacy and male dominance (note the popular expressions "The Man" and "Mr. Charlie"), male spokesmen for Negro rights have sometimes pandered to sexism in their fight against racism.<sup>37</sup>

An example of this is the treatment of black women within the Black Panther Party. Although women held important positions in the party, and were valued for their intellectual and organizational capabilities, they were brutally abused both physically and verbally. Elaine Brown explains her problem with the rampant sexism in Black Panther Party after she had become the chairman:

There was one result of all this I had failed to think through: I had introduced a number of women in the party's administration. There were too many women in command of the affairs of the Black Panther Party, numerous men were grumbling. "I hear we can't call them bitches no more," one Brother actually stated to me in the middle of an extraordinarily hectic day.... It was a given that the entire Black Power movement was handicapped by the limited roles the Brothers allowed the Sisters and by the outright oppressive behavior of men toward women. The party was so far to the left of the civil rights and black nationalist men, nothing in their philosophies was dreamt of in ours. And because of Huey [Newton] - and now Larry [Henson] - I had been able to deflect most of the chauvinism of Black Panther men. My leadership was secure. Thus, in installing Sisters in key positions, I had not considered this business. I had only considered the issue of merit, which had no gender.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Murray 187.

<sup>38</sup> Elaine Brown, A Taste of Power, A Black Woman's Story (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1992) 363.

According to Murray, black women's contributions have been grossly neglected.<sup>39</sup> For instance, several black women, such as Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Mary Church Terrell were very important figures in civil rights struggle. Yet their names, although better known than some other female civil rights activists, remain fairly unknown to most Americans. Moreover, regardless of black women's contributions to the struggle, the specific issues that pertain to their situation have not been addressed, and at times even further subordination has been suggested. Murray quotes a 1966 editorial of *Ebony* which directed black women to establish a strong family, dominated by a father. The editor also stated that the mother should make sure that her male children receive a good education while the female children ought to marry well.<sup>40</sup> The thinking behind this article was that women should devote their energies only to helping men to achieve, and that personal achievement is not a goal for women. The understanding was that the women's civil rights struggle had been only to directly advance the status of black men, and their own status only as it relates to that of the men. Similar ideas are expressed currently by black Muslim leader Louis Farakhan.

The men in the black community have not been alone in assuming the idea that the most important struggle for all African-American people is the struggle against racism. Many women have accepted this attitude as well. According to bell hooks, this has been the prevailing view in the black community among both men and women. In her book

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<sup>39</sup> Murray 188.

<sup>40</sup> Murray 189.

Talking Back, bell hooks describes her experience of talking to a group of black women as recently as 1987 at Tufts University:

I was excited by the idea of talking with so many young black women but surprised when these women suggested that sexism was not a political issue of concern to black women, that the serious issue was racism.<sup>41</sup>

Many African-Americans have accepted the role that capitalist and patriarchal white western culture has reserved for women.<sup>42</sup> As a result, when black women have insisted on women's rights, they have been perceived as turning against black men and their behavior has been considered treacherous to the struggle against racism.<sup>43</sup> If the civil rights struggle does not include women's rights and the women's movement does not address racism, the bottom line is that both movements are inadequate to end oppression for black women. In order for them to attain their freedom, they need to be freed from racial and gender constraints.<sup>44</sup>

### **Economic oppression**

With racism and sexism being the defining elements in the oppression of African-American women, their combined effects often result in economic oppression. Therefore some black feminists, such as Deborah King and Alice Walker, consider economic oppression as part of the multiple jeopardy factor.

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<sup>41</sup> bell hooks, Talking Back 177.

<sup>42</sup> Linda La Rue, "Civil Rights and Women's Liberation" Guy-Sheftall 171.

<sup>43</sup> Murray 192.

<sup>44</sup> La Rue 169.

Socialist feminists consider racism and sexism to be a result of a capitalist economic system. It could be the case that racism and/or sexism have developed independently of capitalism. Nevertheless capitalism has fostered the continuation of sexist and racist forms of oppression along with economic oppression. However, analyzing capitalist exploitation of the working class does not explain a division of labor along racial and/or gender lines as well as the consequent unequal distribution of wealth. In her article "Theorizing Race, Class and Gender" Rose M. Brewer explains how this happens. Sexist and racist attitudes influence who will be hired for any given occupation. General economic and labor transformations on the other hand influence the availability of jobs. Within this context racism and sexism gain a new meaning. Instead of acknowledging racist and sexist attitudes and exploitation of cheap labor, it is easier to blame the least desirable group for their lack of work or a sufficient.<sup>45</sup>

In analyzing black women's labor transformation, Brewer demonstrates the simultaneity of sexism, racism and classism. Black women represent a disproportionate section of the poor and are at the lowest income levels of wage labor. Brewer explains that as black women have moved to industrial and clerical work, they still occupy a vulnerable position and are "last to [be] hired and first to [be] fired."<sup>46</sup> Internationalization of labor has placed American workers into competition with cheap foreign labor. Since black women already occupy a vulnerable position in the labor market, they bear the brunt

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<sup>45</sup> Rose M. Brewer, "Theorizing Race, Class and Gender" Theorizing Black Feminisms, ed. James, S. and Busia, A. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 20.

<sup>46</sup> Brewer 19.

of the labor crises. This in turn will influence the impoverishment of black families.<sup>47</sup>

Combined with inequality at the labor market, black women face unreasonable expectations at home. Rose M. Brewer writes:

Their [black women's] work within the home is devalued, even though housework is accomplished under trying circumstances: substandard housing, no household washers and dryers, or few appliances, yet these women are increasingly expected to work in low-paid jobs to qualify for AFDC. Indeed "workfare" is the key to recent public "welfare reform" legislation. Here again, race and gender intersect to anchor African-American women in a different stratum from white women or Black men.<sup>48</sup>

According to Linda London, women overall are more affected by economic crisis than men. Based on the 1980 U.S. Census Bureau Report London writes, "From 1970 to 1980, the number of families falling below the poverty line increased by 975,000. Virtually all of that increase involved what the Census Bureau calls 'female householders, no husband present.'"<sup>49</sup> Socialist and Marxist feminists take women's economically disadvantageous situation to indicate that women are a separate class in the capitalist, class divided social structure.

Many Marxists consider capitalism as the reason for both women's oppression and racism. For example, Lucy Parsons a black woman who was very active in the Socialist Labor party in the end of nineteenth century, strongly advocated that the exploited working class, including white and black women, should try to abolish

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<sup>47</sup> Brewer 19.

<sup>48</sup> Brewer 25.

<sup>49</sup> Linda London, "Women Bear the Brunt of Economic Crises" Jaggar and Rothenberg 43.

capitalistic exploitation. She did not consider racism or sexism to be more than an extension of economic oppression. According to Parsons the reason why poor black people were further oppressed was due to the fact that they were even more poor than the white workers.<sup>50</sup>

The reason, however, why black Americans were poorer was racism. Likewise all women bear the brunt of economic crises because of sexism. Lenin's solution for abolishing women's oppression was to "draw the women into socially productive labor, extricate them from 'domestic slavery,' free them of their stultifying and humiliating resignation to the perpetual and exclusive atmosphere of the kitchen and nursery."<sup>51</sup> Even though Lenin proposed to 'free' women, his statement itself can be considered sexist. There are two main factors that lead to such statements: the devaluing of work that has been traditionally performed by women and a capitalist economy in which domestic labor is not value producing since it is not involved in commodity production. However, without domestic labor performed by somebody, nobody will be able to produce commodities. If both parents are involved in commodity production, somebody needs to be hired to do the domestic labor.

Black women have often been the ones who perform domestic labor for wages. Since black men, due to racism, have been denied the same economic opportunities as white men to support their families, more black than white women have been forced to

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<sup>50</sup> Angela Y. Davis Women, Race & Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1944) 153-154.

<sup>51</sup> V.I. Lenin, "The Emancipation of Women" Philosophy of Woman ed. Mahowald, Mary Briody (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983) 119

supplement the family income. Again due to racism, but in the case of women also because of sexism, there have been few good jobs available for black women. Many black women then have been confined to the “perpetual and exclusive atmosphere of nursery and kitchen” of white women whose husbands had earned them an economic status high enough to afford to pay for “domestic slavery.”<sup>52</sup>

Socialist feminists realize that abolishing capitalism will not automatically liberate women. The Charlotte Perkins Gilman chapter of the New American Movement states that:

As feminists, we see sexism as a primary focus; we fight against all forms and facets of sexism. We attack the inferior economic and legal status of women. We oppose the sexual division of labor, in which men and women have different responsibilities for home and family and unequal work divisions in the outside work place.<sup>53</sup>

What socialist feminists fail to realize is the need to address racism, along with sexism and economic exploitation. Even though they propose to: “work along with other oppressed groups,” it is not enough. Feminism needs to fight racism together with sexism and economic oppression, without separating the issues. This the main Black feminists message.

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<sup>52</sup> Lenin, Mahowald 119.

<sup>53</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman Chapter of the New American Movement “A View of Socialist Feminism” Jaggar and Rothenberg 152.



## **Race/Sex Dilemma**

The multiple jeopardy factor does not only cause African-American women to suffer from a specific form of oppression, but also creates specific dilemmas only they face. When the interests of black women and men clash, black women need to seriously consider the possible consequences if they speak up against black men. First of all if black women insist on their rights, they may be viewed among black men (and other women) as behaving in a way that is detrimental to African Americans in general, as I mentioned earlier. This reaction is not completely unfounded. When speaking against an African-American male, the larger society may view the issue as a break in racial solidarity and take advantage of the situation to the disadvantage of all African-Americans.

A case of a black rapist is an example of a situation in which the interests of black men and women clash. White patriarchal society created a stereotype of black men, according to which black men are unable to control their sexuality, and as a result are likely to rape women. Because of the stereotype, many black men have been innocently accused of raping white women. The men, and consequently the entire black community have suffered horrendous treatment, such as lynching or other violence. However, even if most of the black men accused of raping women were innocent, there still were black men who were guilty. This creates a special dilemma for black women since they, not white women, are the most likely victims of rape when it does occur. How then can a black woman speak up against rape by black men and not feed the stereotype?

Alice Walker in her short story, "Advancing Luna and Ida B. Wells,"  
contemplates this issue:

Who knows what the black women thinks of rape? Who has asked her? Who cares? Who has even properly acknowledged that *she* and not the white woman in this story is the most likely victim of rape? Whenever interracial rape is mentioned, a black woman's first thought is to protect the lives of her brothers, her father, her sons, her lover. A history of lynching has bred this reflex in her. I feel it as strongly as anyone.<sup>54</sup>

In the story a black protagonist develops a friendship with a white civil rights activist, Luna. Luna tells the protagonist that she has been raped by a black man. When asked why she did not scream, Luna responds "You know why."<sup>55</sup> The reason is that too many innocent black men had been lynched under the accusations of rape. Luna's sensitivity to racism prevented her from speaking up. However, by telling the protagonist about the supposed rape she stirred up the dilemma in her and scarred the friendship. Walker's essay thus also expresses how black and white women are divided by this issue.

The myth of the black rapist underlines several issues simultaneously. For white women this myth ferments fear. By this fear, white men control their sexual activity. (I will discuss this more in a later section, "The Myth of a Black Rapist.") When a white woman speaks out about being raped by a black man, she may feed the stereotype about black men, but she does not have to suffer the consequences of the stereotype in a same direct manner as black people. When a black woman on the other hand speaks up, she is

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<sup>54</sup> Alice Walker, "Advancing Luna and Ida B. Wells" Midnight Birds ed. Mary Washington (New York: Anchor Books, 1980) 70.

<sup>55</sup> Walker 70.

taken to be turning against her own people. In doing so she turns against herself. But if she does not speak up, she still turns against herself.

It is probable that there is no fundamental difference between the white rapist or the black rapist. However, in the racist, patriarchal, imperialist society, the act itself gains meaning from social content that surrounds it. Dealing with a rape of a white woman by a black man, black women face more issues than the immorality of the act. Traditionally white female beauty has been elevated. If a black man rapes a white woman because of his desire for her, or for his desire for what she represents, black women experience this as racism from black men. Walker quotes Eldridge Cleaver stating that black men practice on black women before they move on to white women.<sup>56</sup> This again creates a division between black women and white women, but moreover it oppresses black women even further. Naturally black women would not trade places with anyone being raped, but if this rape symbolizes desire, the desire is likely to present itself in other situations as well. Cornel West writes:

Instead of black women being the most sought after “objects of sexual pleasure”—as in the case of black men—white women tend to occupy this “upgraded,” that is degraded, position primarily because white beauty plays a weightier role in sexual desirability for women in racist patriarchal America. The ideal of female beauty in this country puts a premium on lightness and softness mythically associated with white women and down plays the rich stylistic manners associated with black women. This operation is not simply more racist to black women than that at work in relation to black men; it also is more devaluing of women in general than that at work in relation to men in general. This means that black women are subject to more multilayered bombardments of racist assaults than black men, in addition to the sexist assaults they receive from black men. Needless to say, most black men—especially professional ones—simply

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<sup>56</sup> Walker 69.

recycle this vulgar operation along the axis of lighter hues that results in darker black women bearing more of the brunt than their already devalued lighter sisters.<sup>57</sup>

It is also possible that black men rape white women out of rage. On this Walker quotes LeRoi Jones: "Rape the white girls. Rape their fathers."<sup>58</sup> This brings up the question of right and wrong. Regardless of the wrongs black people have suffered, most black people do not search for revenge against innocent white people. The black church, for instance, emphasizes love and forgiveness. Just because many white people exhibit immoral racist behavior does not mean that all black people return this behavior with revenge. Those who do not would obviously have a problem with black men raping white women only to "rape their fathers."

The case of Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill presents a perfect example of this old dilemma. White feminists were keen to embrace the brave act of Anita Hill in speaking up against Clarence Thomas' alleged sexual harassment. According to Nellie Y. McKay, many white feminists were blind to the dilemma faced by black women.<sup>59</sup>

Cornel West criticizes black leadership for not addressing the issues pertaining to the intersection of race and gender.<sup>60</sup> According to West in the case of Clarence Thomas/ Anita Hill hearings, the black leadership was caught in what he calls, "racial reasoning." West presents racial reasoning as follows: "black authenticity → black

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<sup>57</sup> Cornel West, "Black Sexuality" *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 130.

<sup>58</sup> Walker 69.

<sup>59</sup> Nellie Y. McKay "Acknowledging Differences" *James and Busia* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 276.

<sup>60</sup> West 35.

closing-ranks mentality → black male subordination of black women in the interest of the black community in a hostile white racist country.”<sup>61</sup> In the case of Clarence Thomas, Republicans exploited the racial reasoning; Democrats and blacks did not dare to speak up. This case epitomizes the black women’s dilemma. It shows how race and gender issues for black women and all women of color are inseparable. And they should be inseparable for white women as well. Gender issues influence how some racial issues should be approached and vice versa.

I agree with black feminists that racism and sexism are interconnected. Unfortunately not everybody realizes this. As a result racist white women hinder their own liberation. Black women have been naturally aware of the nature of oppression, because they have been most effected by the combined effects of racism, sexism and economic oppression. However, white women have not escaped the effects of racism either. In the next section I will discuss in more detail how racism has affected white women.

### ***White Women and Racism***

White women by and large have not found it important to address issues of racism. They have not in the past been interested in incorporating a struggle against racism as part of a feminist struggle merely because these are inseparable for black women. And they have not been able to acknowledge that racist issues also negatively influenced their own

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<sup>61</sup> West 38.

lives. Besides, many feminists have been outright racists themselves. Black women understandably have been more aware of the interdependency of racism and women's oppression than white women. Fannie Lou Hamer commented on this interdependency: "You know I work for the liberation of all people because when I liberate myself, I'm liberating other people... her [the white women's] freedom is shackled in chains to mine and she realizes for the first time that she is not free until I am free."<sup>62</sup>

### **Myth of the Black Rapist**

According to Cornel West black sexuality is a taboo subject in America. The reason is, he believes, that black sexuality represents lack of control over black people's activities, which in turn creates fear in white people.<sup>63</sup> If this is the case, sexual relationships between black men and white women also mean white man's lack of control over white women's sexuality. "Social scientists have long acknowledged that interracial sex and marriage is the most *perceived* source of white fear of black people—just as the repeated castration of lynched black men cries out for serious psychocultural explanation," writes Cornel West.<sup>64</sup> Therefore besides being an attempt by racist white males to control African-Americans, lynching black men was also a way to control white women.<sup>65</sup>

One reason for having white women on a pedestal was to control their activities, including sexual activities. White women were supposed to be chaste and prudent,

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<sup>62</sup> Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 1, Autumn 1988.

<sup>63</sup> King 125.

<sup>64</sup> West 125.

<sup>65</sup> Giddings 206.

according to the stereotype. Sexual relations with black men meant that the stereotype did not fit and consequently proved that white men had no control over white women's sexuality, possibly not over other aspects of women's lives either. The myth of the black rapist caused fear in and condemnation by white women. It also gave an excuse for white men to assuage their fear of losing control of black people and of white women in the name of protecting women. For example, after the Civil War southern white women had gained more independence and awareness of their own abilities. As a result they were not satisfied with their role on the pedestal. Paula Giddings writes, "That White southern women were squirming on their postwar pedestals undoubtedly contributed to the rise of lynching in these years, observed southern historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. The 'pursuit of the black rapist represented a trade-off.... the right of the southern lady to protection presupposed her obligation to obey.'"<sup>66</sup> In other words, since white women supposedly needed the protection of white men against black men, they were not so independent and capable of caring for themselves after all. However, being dependent also means surrendering control of one's activities and thus the exchange was protection for control.

Naturally the issue of the black rape separated black and white women. The myth of the black rapist created fear and condemnation in white women, when in reality black women were, and had for centuries been dealing with the reality of the white (and black) rapist. In order for white women to face the reality and support black women on this issue, they would have had to turn against their own men. Instead, some white women accepted

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<sup>66</sup> Giddings 81.

their husbands sexual relations with black women as a lesser evil, in the fear that they would direct their sexual abuse and exploitation on white women if they could not have access to black women.<sup>67</sup> Eventually during 1930's white women took a stand against lynching, but even today the KKK is active and several of its members are women.<sup>68</sup>

### **Patriarchy -- The Main Problem**

According to bell hooks, many white Western feminists still consider racism, economic oppression and ecological disasters the result of patriarchal social structure. Therefore they consider sexism to be the most important issue to work against, seeing other problems, such as racism as only secondary. "Such thinking prevails despite radical critiques made by black women and other women of color who question this proposition," she writes.<sup>69</sup>

Nellie Y. McKay in her article "Acknowledging Differences" makes the same point as she writes about different reactions by white and black women to the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings:

In a rare triumphant moment of almost universal gender awareness, these women [white feminists, who supported Hill] forgot that for Black women, issues of gender are always connected to race, that the two are inseparable. Under no circumstances can Black women forget that. And although Black feminists, even radical Black feminists, have been trying to impress the significance of this truth on white feminists for more than twenty years, some

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<sup>67</sup> Giddings 86.

<sup>68</sup> Giddings 87.

<sup>69</sup> bell hooks *Talking Back, Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989)19.



still do not understand. Black women cannot choose between their commitment to feminism and the struggle with their men for racial justice.<sup>70</sup>

It appears that Anita Hill was faced with the dilemma of speaking up or remaining silent and protective of black men. For black women, however, making this choice does not necessary mean making a choice between commitment to feminism on one hand and commitment to struggle against racism on the other.

White women have been influenced by racism. Parallel means to keep control over women and African-Americans have been used by white men. Similar laws have been enacted to oppress and to diminish oppression. It has not been a coincidence that women and blacks have lost power and gained power at the same time. For instance, the first Africans worked as indentured servants in the U.S.<sup>71</sup> Yet it still is difficult for some women to acknowledge that their oppression is connected to the oppression of African-Americans. They do not realize that the entire system of domination has to be abolished in order for them to be free.

## ***Conclusion***

There are two main problems then that black women face with traditional feminism. One is the racist attitudes among white feminists; the second is the lack of interest and commitment to issues about race and the lack of acknowledgment of the interconnectedness of racism and sexism. Many black women have lost trust in white

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<sup>70</sup> McKay, "Acknowledging Differences" James and Busia (New York: Routledge, 1993) 276.

<sup>71</sup> Giddings 34.

women because many times they have been taken advantage of. White women on the other hand still lack the realization of the specific needs of black women as they are subjected to multiple jeopardy, and how black women's needs actually are connected to their own liberation

In the next section I will discuss the racist and colonial oppression that Finnish people have faced in the past. I believe that past racism has been part of forming women's identity in Finland and therefore influenced the development of present day feminist consciousness among Finnish women. Following the black feminist idea about the interconnectedness of racism, economic oppression and sexism, I will then proceed to discuss Finnish women in relation to Finland's economic development and the sexist oppression that Finnish women are faced with.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Finnish Women**

#### ***Introduction***

Finland's cultural development became tied to the west when the western Catholic Church instead of the Russian Orthodox Church won precedence over Finnish pagan beliefs and rituals. Although Finland has been greatly influenced by Western culture it is also different from it in many ways. It appears to me that as new ideas and theories arrive in Finland from the West they are often taken to apply to Finns as if we shared the history of other Western or at least Scandinavian countries. This I believe has also been the case with Feminism. Feminist theories that are developed in Western Europe and in the U.S.A. are taken to apply to the Finnish women. However, the realities of the majority of Finnish women have been different from their Western sisters.

In this section I will first discuss Finnish racial identity. I will then discuss the economic development of Finland and how it relates to women. Finally I will discuss the sexism that Finnish women face, regardless of the advances that the society has made in favor of women.

## ***The Race Question in Finland***

"Suomalaiset eivät ole kenenkään sukua  
suomalaiset syntyvät järvistä ja kivistä  
he astuvat esiin lähteistä ja puroista  
kivet maassa ovat heidän luittensa sukua  
he viettävät kuutamohäitä järвинаistensa kanssa  
kasilapalmikkoisten sulkahiuksisten naisten kanssa" (Helvi Hämäläinen)

"Finns are of nobody's kin  
Finns are born of lakes and stones  
they step out of springs and creeks  
stones on the ground are the kin of their bones  
they celebrate wedding ceremonies in the moonlight with their lake women  
the women with rushy braids and hair of feather"<sup>1</sup>

Nowadays anybody who has come in contact with the Finns would most likely consider them representing the epitome, or at least very close to it, of the so called Caucasian race as far as their physical appearance is concerned. However, the race of the Finns has been highly problematic in Europe. Over time there were many different theories about the racial origins of the Finns but one of the most prominent was our presumed relation to Asians. While all the other Europeans were considered white, the Finns and the Lapps (people of Lapland, which is the northern part of Finland), were considered to be primitive aborigines and to be part of the Mongolian race.<sup>2</sup> Aira Kemiläinen writes:

In one of his later books Blumenbach suggested that all Europeans except Finns and Lapps were white and Caucasians. So Finns had to be Mongols. A great many scholars and still more dilettantes accepted this statement, and until the 20th century Finns were described in encyclopedias, textbooks and racial studies as Mongols. Their characteristics also gradually changed. They became short of stature and yellow-skinned; they had black, straight hair, dark small eyes, a flat face, a small nose and prominent cheekbones. In the eyes or imagination of European

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1 Aira Kemiläinen, *Suomalaiset, Outo Pohjolan Kansa*, my translation, (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1993) 376.

2 Kemiläinen 395.

anthropologists Mongols had those characteristics. In addition, they claimed that Finns were not sharp-witted, and they mentioned also that in general, Finno-Ugrians had not been capable of founding political societies and states. So they belonged to the servant class of mankind.<sup>3</sup>

Blumenbach (1752-1840) is one of the most famous people in race theory. According to Kemiläinen, he was mostly responsible for the persistent theory of Finns belonging to the Mongolian race.

Racial categorizing in Europe resulted in rather amusing arguments by contemporary scholars. This to me presents the irony of the racial categorizing of human kind over all. Kemiläinen describes how a French scholar intentionally insulted the Prussians by claiming that they did not belong to the Germanic, Aryan race, but were relatives to the Finns. As a result the worried Prussians started to investigate. They managed to find a bone in the Finnish skulls that exists in animals, only to later discover that the bone is also present in the Aryan skulls.<sup>4</sup>

In Finland, racist discrimination developed into a language battle. The Swedish-Finns considered themselves Germanic, while Finnish speaking Finns were supposed to belong to the Asian race. The Finns were not too sorry about their relatives, according to Kemiläinen. The Japanese for example were regarded highly because of their success in fighting against Russia 1904-1905. Finland had at the time been under the Russian rule.<sup>5</sup> However, in domestic relations it was not healthy to have part of the population thinking of themselves as better than others, especially since the hierarchy was a leftover from Swedish domination. Some went so far as to claim that Finns had the Swedes to thank for their national existence.<sup>6</sup> The fact that Finns were considered a lower race,

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<sup>3</sup> Kemiläinen 395.

<sup>4</sup> Kemiläinen 397.

<sup>5</sup> Kemiläinen 399.

<sup>6</sup> Kemiläinen 399.

Kemiläinen explains, caused anxiety in the relationships between the Finnish speakers and the Swedish speakers.<sup>7</sup> Defining race by the language spoken by any particular individual was also ridiculous in a sense that educated Finns had been required to learn Swedish and acquire a new identity. During the nationalistic movement in Finland many Swedish speakers again assumed Finnish as their native language and changed their names once more -- back to Finnish this time.<sup>8</sup> However there were those who persisted with the idea that the Germanic Swedish speakers were a more uplifted race. They wanted to maintain Finland annexed to Sweden as it had been from the middle ages until 1809. This would have allowed the Swedish-Finns to continue to run the country.<sup>9</sup>

The Swedish-Finns displayed outright prejudices toward the Finns. For example the Swedish-Finnish students proceeded to prevent the Finns from joining student organizations. Public insults were displayed too. As an example Kemiläinen states that in the turn of the decade 1930 a Swedish news paper article was titled: "The Day of the Mongols at the Stadium. A Finnish runner '*slanted eyed*' Matti Järvinen won."<sup>10</sup> (italics mine).

The concept of racial purity was also commonly accepted among the Swedish speaking Finns. Therefore it was not acceptable for a Swedish-Finn to marry a Finn. Since race was tied to linguistic difference, the acceptability of a marriage partner for a Swedish-Finn was based on the native language of the person. An exception was a person who spoke Finnish but had a foreign (Germanic) name. Kemiläinen writes that "A Swedish physician could not marry a school friend that had a Finnish name and who spoke

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<sup>7</sup> Kemiläinen 362.

<sup>8</sup> Kemiläinen 362.

<sup>9</sup> Kemiläinen 362.

<sup>10</sup> Kemiläinen 363.

Finnish as a native language.<sup>11</sup> The stupidity of this all was, as I mentioned earlier, that educated Finns had had to assume Swedish names and identities. Therefore by marrying a Swedish-Finn, one possibly married a Finn with a “false” identity.

Racism between the Swedish-Finns and the Finns in Finland still presents itself occasionally. Matti Kuusi in his memoir describes a conversation with Anitra Karsten, a Swedish-Finn. Kuusi had stated that the Finnish government supports Swedish education more than Finnish. Karsten had responded: "The Swedish speaking population is of Germanic origin and they maintain the Western cultural tradition in the middle of the Eastern-Baltic people [The Finns]."<sup>12</sup> Karsten did not think that it was important to to give equal support to the Baltic race than to the Germanic race. She considered the Swedish-Finns to be the “bridge over to the civilization of the New Europe.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, without the Swedish-Finns, Finland would not and could not be civilized and part of Europe and European tradition. The Swedish-Finns are the bridge from Finland to Europe. Therefore, according to Karsten, it is important to the cultural standard of the country to continue to support the education of those that are capable of keeping Finland civilized, i.e., the Swedish-Finns.

Presently Finns are considered a mixture of different groups. Kemiläinen writes about the Finnish racial origins: “The Siberian genes probably came with Arctic people (‘Mongoloids’) or with Finno-Ugrians who perhaps were a mixture of ‘Europoids’ and ‘Mongoloids’ or an individual branch of a very ancient stock. The Baltic nations are also,

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<sup>11</sup> Kemiläinen 364.

<sup>12</sup> Kemiläinen, my translation, 365.

<sup>13</sup> Kemiläinen 365.

from the viewpoint of genetics, close to Finns. Gothic and Germanic people, Scandinavians and later Swedes moved in over a very long period from the West.”<sup>14</sup>

Finns indeed seem to be a hodge podge of everything around them, as are most human beings. Kemiläinen states that, "Questions of race and the origin of Finns probably no more inflame minds. Race has, indeed, also lost its significance." I do not agree with her in this. It is true that Finnish people rarely concern themselves with questions of race. However, I believe that the legacy of our racist past still continue to influence our lives. It affects first of all how Finns view themselves, and I believe that the racist/colonial experiences have also influenced the formation of feminist consciousness.

### ***Finnish Women and Economics***

The Feminist movement in Finland at its early stages tended to elevate motherhood. As Raija Julkunen writes "It used motherhood to define emancipation, to obtain social recognition and respect." The private sphere became woman's territory. Through education and political participation women were to utilize the concept of motherhood in structuring the entire society.<sup>15</sup>

Julkunen writes that "Even working-class women accepted motherhood, enlightened home care and the professionalisation of domestic work as the recipe for women's liberation."<sup>16</sup> "However," she continues, "due to the special character of the Finnish economy, full-time motherhood has never taken such firm root as in other Western countries."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kemiläinen 406

<sup>15</sup> Raija Julkunen "Women In The Welfare State" The Lady with the Bow ed. Manninen, Merja and Päivi Setälä (Helsinki: Otava Publishing Company Ltd, 1990) 150.

<sup>16</sup> Julkunen, "Women" 150.

<sup>17</sup> Julkunen, "Women" 151.



Finland industrialized very late. In 1906 when women received suffrage, Finland was still nearly 90% agrarian.<sup>18</sup> By 1950 75% of the population still lived in rural areas, and 40% earned their livelihood from agriculture. By 1970 the numbers had dropped down to approximately 20%.<sup>19</sup>

When Finland started to industrialize women could not stay home caring for children, because of the economic interests of the country. Every able person was needed in building the country. Maritta Pohls writes:

The entry of women into paid work was also facilitated by there being no tradition of idlers in Finland. The number of people actually outside production was infinitely small, and natural conditions in Finland were so tough that virtually the whole population had to be gainfully employed and earning a living. There were few administrators and they lived partly in the countryside from where they derived part of their income. Few officials were so rich that the members of their families could live a life of ease and luxury. Thus for women moving into paid work in the nineteenth century there existed two value modes: that of the growing middle class in which a woman's place was in the home, and that of their grandmothers in which it was natural for women to play a role in production.<sup>20</sup>

Western ideals of women's place being at home were just slowly starting to creep into the society. Since this attitude could only prevail in the upper class, the reality of very few women could be affected by this ideology. Finland had a small upper class to start with and it was mainly Swedish speaking. Few families could afford not to have grown daughters earn their living even during the 17th century. Merja Manninen writes about 17th century women in Finland that "virtually every young, unmarried woman was

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<sup>18</sup> Irma Sulkunen "The Mobilisation of Women and the Birth of Civil Society" Manninen and Setälä 52.

<sup>19</sup> Pirjo Markkola "Women in Rural Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries" Manninen and Setälä 19.

<sup>20</sup> Maritta Pohls "Women's work in Finland 1870-1940" Manninen and Setälä 69.

forced to hire herself out as a domestic servant. Even the daughters of town burghers might well serve a period as a servant before getting married."<sup>21</sup> Finnish women have therefore a long history of working for pay. In contrast to other countries, the Finnish upper- and middle-class were too insignificant for the development of a stereotype of women as weak, dependent, and passive. Raija Julkunen writes:

For a long time the country remained a poor, agrarian society with an insignificant upper and middle class. The typical bourgeois model of sexual differentiation the man as breadwinner, the woman as wife and mother - has never been so strong in Finland as in the earlier industrialised and more pronounced class societies of Europe. Backward Finland needed women's labour in both industry and agriculture... Its agrarian structure favoured educating women and their participation in political life, similarly creating an image of the strong and hard working woman be she the wife of a peasant or a plywood factory worker.<sup>22</sup>

The upper-class was largely Swedish and thus divided from the working class by class and by the imagined racial difference. Regardless of their differences, Finnish women accepted the elevated idea of motherhood although it was not a reality to most women in Finland. Women's employment was not considered emancipatory, but a necessity. It was assumed that as Finland developed, women would eventually stay home. Women's high engagement in the work force "was not an objective or a source of pride, but an inevitability in the face of poverty," writes Julkunen.<sup>23</sup>

As Finland has developed into a welfare state the working class has worked itself up into the middle class. The time frame between being an agricultural society to a fully industrialized nation has been too short to affect the mentality of the people as far as women's work and place are concerned, and it parallels more the development of African-

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<sup>21</sup> Merja Manninen "Women in Rural Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries" Manninen and Setälä 12.

<sup>22</sup> Julkunen "Women" 143.

<sup>23</sup> Julkunen "Women" 151.

American women than white women in the U.S. Pirjo Markkola writes about the rural women in Finland:

Work to them was not a right , but a necessity. The idea of work as the emancipator of women is, especially for those from the laboring class, highly suspect. These women worked continuously, but it did not improve their lot or make them economically independent. The earnings of laborers' wives were an essential contribution to the household, the survival of which required that all its members worked. Thus the contribution of women was of importance not only in performing the 'household chores', but in earning money outside the home. Laborers' wives are a reminder that it is not possible to differentiate people from their social position by their work. Work has not the same meaning to all women.<sup>24</sup>

Even though the reality has been the same for the white working class women in the U.S., the difference is that in U.S. the middle-class value system, including the stereotypical woman on a pedestal, was able to penetrate the nation as a whole and become the norm.

Second-wave feminists in the U.S. tended to consider women's main problems to be economic dependence and motherhood. Jeffner Allen for example suggests in her article "Motherhood - The Annihilation of Women" that women should refuse to bear children. However, for many women work had not brought independence. For a working class mother, being able to stay home and care for one's children would have been a privilege and emancipatory. Although mainstream feminist ideology may have arisen and developed among middle class women, contemporary feminists have become aware of the above argument. However, while in the U.S.A. poor women were a fraction of all women, in Finland the majority of women fell into the group where they could not be confined at home and be just mothers. Therefore regardless of the ideals of people, the reality for most Finnish women was not to stay home and care for children but to earn a paycheck together with motherhood. Besides the fact that they were not considered as

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<sup>24</sup> Markkola 27-28.

belonging to the Caucasian race regardless of how blond or blue eyed they were, Finnish women have had no time to stay on a pedestal. They have always been too busy working in the home as well as outside the home.

Second-wave feminism removed the ideological barriers to accepting women's employment, and Nordic welfare states have provided women with realistic possibilities to combine motherhood with career. However, in Finland motherhood was combined with employment before it was ideologically accepted or institutionally realized. Finnish women engaged in paid labor out of necessity.<sup>25</sup> Raija Julkunen writes that "It is quite obvious that leaving children without proper care was a working-class family problem and domestic servants the upper working and middle-class solution."<sup>26</sup> Latchkey kids were common because of the lack of daycare options. According to Julkunen in working class families in 1961, "Of the under three year olds, 'only' 2% were uncared for, but apparently most of the 3 to 7-year-olds [were]."<sup>27</sup>

Unlike other Nordic countries, Finland changed from an agrarian society directly to a society where women are integrated in to the paid labor force, skipping over a period of women as full-time homemakers. According to Julkunen, in Denmark and Sweden socialized daycare was developed as women began to work outside the home. In Finland women had been working long before daycare became available.<sup>28</sup>

The contemporary welfare state has not only provided possibilities for combining motherhood with employment, it is more supportive of it than full-time motherhood, writes Julkunen.<sup>29</sup> Although the integration of women in the labor force was a reality

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<sup>25</sup> Julkunen "Women" 151.

<sup>26</sup> Julkunen "Women" 152.

<sup>27</sup> Julkunen "Women" 152.

<sup>28</sup> Raija Julkunen Hyvinvointivaltio Käännkohdassa (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1992) 41.

<sup>29</sup> Julkunen Hyvinvointi Valtio 42.

already before Finland was a well developed nation, a supportive welfare system and a change in ideology has created a permanent role for women as wage earners. In a welfare state women have a right to social services on the basis of their own employment and citizenship rather than through their husbands' employment. Social policies have emphasized the similarity of men and women rather than their differences. The main responsibilities of an adult are those of a parent, employee and citizen, regardless of sex.

<sup>30</sup> Julkunen writes:

The Nordic model has diminished gender and class differences. From a comparative perspective men and women live similar lives that overlap one another, although job markets do create differentiated worlds for men and women. Also women across class lines live similar lives. Although education, employment and income do separate women from one another, still all working mothers have shared needs and benefits across class lines.<sup>31</sup>

Julkunen states that, "The caring state can be considered a particularly feminist achievement. With the state women redistribute the caring tasks belonging to the private life circle." Although women's rights have not been on the agenda, the fact that women have been actively engaged in politics and in the work force have formed the social structure in ways that diverge from a purely patriarchal society.

### ***Finnish Women and Sexism***

Tässä ovat  
lihapullat kaalikeitto ja  
mansikkakiisseli  
pakastimesta löytyy tuoretta pullaa  
ja kuivakakkua  
paitasi ovat hyllyllä silitettyinä

Here are  
meatballs cabbage soup and  
strawberry fool  
in the freezer fresh sweet bread  
and coffee cake  
your shirts are ironed in the closet

Äidin lähtö työmatkalle ei totisesti ole  
yksinkertainen juttu

It truly is not simple  
for a Mother to travel on the job

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<sup>30</sup> Julkunen Hyvinvointi Valtio 42.

<sup>31</sup> Julkunen Hyvinvointi Valtio (my translation) 42.

Kunnes eräänä aamuna  
kävelen matkalaukun kanssa jo tiellä  
kun hätäntynyt mieheni  
huutaa avoimesta ikkunasta  
missä kiisselit lihapullat sukat solmiot  
entä viikkosiivous!

Minä viaton ilme kasvoillani  
Oi unohdin ne vallan  
luentojeni valmistus vei  
kaikki ajatukseni

Käyttäkää nyt luovaa mielikuvitusta  
isot ihmiset! <sup>32</sup>

Until one morning  
when I'm already outside with my suitcase  
my worried husband  
calls from an open window  
where are fools meatballs socks ties  
how about weekly cleaning!

I reply with an innocent face  
Oh I forgot  
to prepare my lectures  
took all my thoughts

Now please use your imagination  
grown people!

What is the point of talking about sexism in relation to Finnish women, one might ask. It seems that they have achieved what feminists are aiming for. What more could they want? It is true that Finnish women are employed, their child care problems have been solved better than most of their international sisters, and they are well represented in politics. (In the 1991 parliament election women won 46% of representation, however in 1995 women lost many seats in parliament leaving only 38% representation.) Regardless of all the benefits, women in Finland still face many unfair and unnecessary obstacles due to their gender.

In Finnish society women have become similar to men (as opposed to equal to men), according to Julkunen. The differences between men and women have been diminished by providing solutions to practical issues that prevent women from participating in the world on an equal basis with men. Women in Finland are well educated, they work full time, they are unionized by their occupations, they have a right to abortion and birth control, they have long paid parental leaves and access to child

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<sup>32</sup> Anja Porio, Mikä Nainen (my translation) (Tampere: Gaudeamus, 1992) 44.

care.<sup>33</sup> Regardless of all this, occupations are still largely segregated by gender. Women are overrepresented in care and service occupations. These jobs also happen to be underpaid. For instance, in 1985 those women who had worked full-time all year earned 71% of the salaries of men. (Julkunen quotes Allén p.46)<sup>34</sup>

Instead of being dependent on a husband, Nordic women are dependent on the state for their benefits. The problem with this is that it is the woman, the mother, who is dependent on the state instead of the parent. If one parent decides to stay home on state aid to care for children it is usually the woman, even when she makes more money than her husband. One could argue that it is still her choice. However, the question is how much is it a choice when it is still based on societal expectations. Even though policies have become more gender neutral, the practices have not. This leaves women in a vulnerable position. If during economic crises the social benefits need to be cut, this will influence women directly. As long as the attitudes about women's roles have not changed, it is the women who will lose their choice and ability to "have it all. A Finnish woman not only "has it all" but she also "does it all." Women's roles in Finland have always manifested great flexibility, and this seems not to have changed. Women in early cave paintings in Finland were depicted with a bow, indicating that ancient Finnish women used to hunt along their men.<sup>35</sup> Merja Manninen quotes Roman historian Tacitus (c.98) "The same hunt provides food for men and women alike; for the women go everywhere with the men and claim a share in securing the prey."<sup>36</sup>

Pirjo Markkola quotes British Quakers commenting on Finnish women in the nineteenth century: "Too large a share of the labors of the field is thrown upon the weaker

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<sup>33</sup> Julkunen Hyvinvointi Valtio 46.

<sup>34</sup> Julkunen Hyvinvointi Valtio 46.

<sup>35</sup> Manninen 9.

<sup>36</sup> Manninen 9.

sex. A majority of those we saw thus employed were women. On a cold lowering day we saw a Finn smoking in his house, gazing through the window upon the field in front, where a woman was hard at work. A full share of indoor employment, including the spinning and weaving also falls, without doubt, to the females (1856)." Markkola explains that although division of labor was practiced there was much flexibility. However: "This [flexibility] was mainly one directional: women were expected to do men's work, but not the other way round. (Thus the world of women was stranger to men than their world was to women. Women's flexibility was greater than men's and from this the conclusion can be drawn that women's self-assurance was securely based.)"<sup>37</sup> If these quotes are to be trusted it does not seem that Finnish women are doing anything different from their fore mothers. The kind of work women perform has changed but the attitudes haven't.

The gender politics in Finland have been based on the so-called weak male provider, write Heinämaa and Näre. Since women have borne a large financial responsibility for family welfare, it has been necessary for government to provide for the services usually taken care by women.<sup>38</sup> They conclude that if welfare state will become dismantled, women will suffer negative consequences.<sup>39</sup> This is precisely because the attitudes have not followed the change in the social structure.

At the private level women suffer several forms of sexism. Domestic violence is one major concern. Domestic violence has been considered a private matter, and interference has been seen as problematic for that reason. Rape of a domestic partner did not become a criminal act until 1994. It has been estimated that approximately 20 women

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<sup>37</sup> Markkola 20-21.

<sup>38</sup> Sara Heinämaa and Sari Näre "Siina Paha Missa Viha," Pahan Tyttaret, ed. Heinämaa and Näre (Tampere: Gaudeamus, 1994) 7.

<sup>39</sup> Heinämaa and Näre 7.



are raped in Finland daily; however, only about 1 police report a day is filed for rape. Filed reports usually involve rape by a stranger.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of the large numbers of women in the work force for a long time, sexual harassment is common. In fact at times sexual harassment is so common that women do not even recognize what they have been subjected to.<sup>41</sup>

So besides the wage gap, Finnish women are subjected to other forms of sexism too. Women in Finland carry more responsibilities for household chores and families than men. They are sexually harassed and abused, and they often suffer from domestic violence. Yet, Finnish women continue to be protective of Finnish men in a curious way. Regardless of the political power that they hold, women are reluctant to have a "women's agenda." Finnish women tend to promote the causes of all people. They are careful not to discriminate against men.<sup>42</sup> Finnish women also take pride in their abilities to do it all: from baking to banking. There is almost a belief that men are not capable of carrying out responsibilities quite as well as women.

## ***Conclusion***

Finnish people have faced colonial oppression from Sweden and Russia. They were also considered to belong to the Asian race, and therefore inferior to white, Germanic people. Finland was faced with economic hardship that required women to be part of the work force earlier than other Western women. Finnish women have been politically active from early on, and many welfare state reforms are considered the result

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<sup>40</sup> Heinämaa and Näre 9.

<sup>41</sup> Heinämaa and Näre 9.

<sup>42</sup> Heinämaa and Näre 6.

of women's strong involvement in politics. However, Finnish women are still faced with sexist attitudes. They have not considered sexism a priority to fight against. Women with feminist consciousness have been considered bitter women who cannot find husbands.

Black feminists have discussed women's issues from a perspective that combines racism, sexism and economic oppression. In the next section I will apply black feminist theory to the experiences of Finnish women.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Does Black Feminist Theory Apply to Finnish Women?**

#### ***Introduction***

Patricia Hill Collins suggests "that Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it."<sup>1</sup> According to her view race and gender are essential for producing black feminist theory. It would be silly to assume that Finnish women would consider their theorizing black feminism. Naturally they consider themselves and their theory Finnish, and thus part of the European tradition. However, it is possible to apply Black Feminist theory to Finnish women since Finnish women in actuality develop a feminist consciousness more similar to black women than to other Western-European women and their descendants, who relate closely to mainstream feminist thought. This is possible in two ways. One way is that Finnish women have been exposed to experiences similar to those of African-American women. Another way is that there are other circumstances that can produce the same kind of feminist consciousness.

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22. <sup>1</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York, London: Routledge, 1991)

I believe that in the case of Finnish women their feminist consciousness is mainly a result of a combination of the two. Some of the circumstances of Finnish women are similar to African-American women and some of their experiences are different but have produced similar practical consequences. I therefore intend to argue that it is possible for Finnish women to develop a feminist consciousness similar to black women.

## ***Race***

In the case of African-American women, race is an integral part of their lives and thus it is one of the core issues of Black Feminist thought. Race is one of the components of the multiple jeopardy explained in the first chapter. African-American women are very directly affected by issues pertaining to race. In a racist society race is a central factor in developing one's individuality. Race penetrates all aspects of life. It influences educational and career opportunities and choices as well as personal relationships and community memberships. In a society where racist discourse predominates, all people are placed on one side or another of the discourse. Race influences how a person reflects oneself in the society, which in turn will influence one's sense of self and self-esteem. In the U.S. we are constantly reminded of our membership in one race or another. Census reports inform us how we live and behave in racial categories.

Racial oppression produces counter hegemonic cultures of resistance. These cultures provide safe places for their members to be at ease and help them to deal with the

oppressive and prejudiced world. Therefore many neighborhoods are racially and/or ethnically divided even when segregation is not imposed by the law. Other groups may or may not be welcome, but often outside groups at least assume that they are not welcome.

Although prejudices toward foreigners were expressed during antiquity, the concept of race, according to David Goldberg, was not developed until end of the 15th century.<sup>2</sup> The beginnings of race theory were based on medieval Christian theology, according to which people were divided to the descendants of Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. The descendants of Shem were villainous yellow Asians, descendants of Ham were uncivilized black Africans, and the son's of Japheth were the white, beautiful, and holy Europeans<sup>3</sup>.

Eventually the rise of empiricism and natural science during the 18th century provided a scientific foundation for the theories of racial division and racial hierarchy. The most common theories held that human beings were divided into four different races, namely, the African, the Asian, the American, and the European race.<sup>4</sup> The differences among human beings were presumed to be the result of differences in environments, writes Goldberg. However, the physical characteristics did not change when a person moved to another location, convincing some to believe that the different races did not

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<sup>2</sup> David Theo Goldberg "Rasismin Muuttuva Ilme," *Image* 1 (1988)111.

<sup>3</sup> Goldberg 111.

<sup>4</sup> Kemiläinen 57.

share same origins. According to this view the Europeans were considered to be the descendants of Adam.<sup>5</sup>

Linguists added to the race theory the hierarchy of languages. European languages were believed to be descended from Sanskrit. Other languages supposedly lacked sophistication, expressing the uncivilized nature of the people who spoke it.<sup>6</sup>

It does not seem difficult to question the construction of race theories. It is clear that the standpoint of the European theorists was supremacist toward peoples of other cultures. Europeans were unable to look at others without considering themselves the norm. Therefore instead of equal cultural exchange, the encounters with peoples from afar led to exploitation. The industrial revolution and imperialist mentality provided the means for Europeans to exploit other nations in ways that gave more meaning to racial categorizing. It was morally acceptable to exploit those who were not equal. Not everybody supported the theory of categorizing human beings into several separate races. J.G. v. Herder, a German anthropologist, in the 1920's expressed a viewpoint that all people belong to one race. "Native American and Negro are your brothers, Herder told his readers."<sup>7</sup> In the end of 19th century W.E.B. Du Bois also disputed the scientific notion of race. He writes: "What, then, is race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the

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<sup>5</sup> Goldberg, 111.

<sup>6</sup> Goldberg 112.

<sup>7</sup> Kemiläinen 63.

accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life."<sup>8</sup> Anthony Appiah goes even further; he explains that in order to consider certain people to share a common history there already needs to be a criteria for that group present.<sup>9</sup> He leaves us with nothing as far as race is concerned. "The truth is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask "race" to do for us," Appiah states.<sup>10</sup> Scientifically this is, by and large, the view held today.<sup>11</sup> However, the world, especially the Western world still very much operates under the division of races. Tessie Liu explains racial thinking as "the kind of logic or type of reasoning about human relationships that allows racists to believe in the reality of their categories."<sup>12</sup> Even though there are no scientific bases for race, racist thinking continues to prevail and therefore race is a very real category in our lives, especially in the U.S.A.

Timothy Maliqalim Simone writes in his book, About Face, Race in Postmodern America:

It is in race that the postmodern world today finds its most exemplary vanishing point. Race appears as if it is something fixed and permanent, immune to being altered by the ideas or expressions used to address or comprehend it. Yet, what does it really mean? To what extent does it have anything to say about specifiable differences between peoples, cultures and histories? The point here is that when we talk about race we

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<sup>8</sup> W.E.B. du Bois, "The Conservation of Races" On Sociology and the Black Community (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) 240.

<sup>9</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument" "Race," Writing, And Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 27.

<sup>10</sup> Appiah 35.

<sup>11</sup> James Shreeve, "Terms of Estrangement" *Discover*, V15, n11, Nov (1994) 58.

<sup>12</sup> Tessie Liu, "Teaching The Differences Among Women From A Historical Perspective" *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 14, No. 4 (1991) 270.

are never sure what we are referring to: a dilemma which posits many contradictory futures and opportunities.<sup>13</sup>

Simone accurately pinpoints the problem of race today. Race being a social construct, we do not have anything tangible to hold onto as far as determining what exactly we mean by the concept. Is the determining factor of race skin color, eye color, hair type, way of speaking, talking, singing? It is all of them and yet, none of them. This is why some people are considered to be 'not black enough,' 'too black,' 'an oreo cookie' or 'a black-wanna-be.' We allow an extremely vague concept of race to rule, limit, and disempower us.

I agree that race is a social construct, determined partly by certain biological characteristics. However, in this thesis I will use the term in its traditional sense, referring to African, Caucasian, and Asian phenotypes.

The idea of racism is old. Tessie Liu explains that European societies have been based on kinship. As a result "European society, before actual contact with peoples of different skin tones and different cultures and customs, was organized by racial principles. The operating definition of race was based not on external physical characteristics but on blood ties - or, more precisely, some common substance passed on by fathers."<sup>14</sup> In other words different European nationals have maintained prejudice against other

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy Maliqalim Simone, About Face, Race in Postmodern America (USA: Autonomedia, 1989) 11.

<sup>14</sup> Liu 270.



European nationals. Different ethnic and religious groups have presented racist attitudes toward one another. For example, the Irish have been subjected to prejudice in England. Although in the Irish case the prejudice was based on religion rather than race similarities to the prejudice of African-Americans have been stated by Frederic Douglass and Anthony Appiah. As late as 1973 a member of House of Lords described the differences between Irish Protestants and Catholics to Anthony Appiah as "distinct and clearly definable differences of race." Astonished at this statement Appiah asked the Englishman if he could tell them apart. The answer was: "Of course, any Englishman can."<sup>15</sup> Frederick Douglass writes about the Irish: "these people lacked only a black skin and woolly hair, to complete their likeness to the plantation Negro."<sup>16</sup> Marx has also discussed the analogy between the Irish and the African-Americans. In discussing the attitude of the English proletariat to the Irish proletariat "[it] is much the same as that of the 'poor whites' to the 'niggers' in the former slave states of the U.S.A."<sup>17</sup> Therefore without being categorized as belonging to a different race, white Europeans may still face attitudes very similar to, if not the same as, those black Americans face.

Euro-centrism tends to westernize everything it renders valuable, i.e., the western world takes credit for everything. On the other hand, it also tends to reject what ever is devalued, regardless of the origin. Therefore the term euro-centrism is misleading.

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<sup>15</sup>Appiah 5.

<sup>16</sup>Frederick Douglass, "The Claims of The Negro Ethnologically Considered" African-American Social & Political Thought 1850-1920. ed. Howard Brotz (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1992) 235.

<sup>17</sup>Bernard R. Boxil, Blacks & Social Justice (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2nd ed. 1992)55.

Frederick Douglass also points out that "an educated man in Ireland ceases to be an Irishman; and an intelligent black man is always supposed to have derived his intelligence from his connection with the white race."<sup>18</sup> This shows that euro-centricism only applies to parts of Europe. Many cultures in Europe have been at different times not part of the dominating Europe. As a result some Europeans had to change ethnicity to another European ethnic group or nationality to achieve, for example, education, better jobs, or status.

This is the difference between whites receiving differential treatment in white culture from blacks in white society. The physical differences, even when they are present are usually very subtle, and they are able to pass for an alternative ethnic group. As Douglass said: an Irishman becomes English, while a black person never becomes white. He or she can only derive his abilities from the whites.

Even though a white person may have a theoretical possibility of hiding his or her ethnic or cultural origin, it is not possible in all circumstances. One may not for example be able to learn the correct accent required to hide his or her secret. In many cases a person lacks the material circumstances that would allow her or him to assimilate to the dominant culture, such as money for education or the ability to adapt to new customs. For a person who does not have the ability to get out of the oppressive circumstances, the oppression is as inescapable as for a black person in white society. The person who

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<sup>18</sup> Douglass 235.

is able to hide his or her true identity, on the other hand, will never really belong because she or he is not what she or he appears to be, e.g. homosexuals, who are not open about their sexuality among heterosexuals. In circumstances where openness will close one's opportunities, restrict life (imprisonment), or threaten life, as was the case with Jews in Nazi Germany, people do not really have a choice.

My point is that although for the most part when white people are oppressed by other whites, they may have a choice of hiding their true origin or identity or being open about it, there are instances where this is not possible. Therefore a white woman may actually acquire a similar self-consciousness (or feminist consciousness) based on this form of oppression. There may be variations in how this type of oppression takes place among different ethnic, religious, or racial groups. However, there is diversity among the experiences of black women as well. Patricia Hill Collins recognizes this diversity. She writes: "Other factors such as ethnicity, region of the country, urbanization, and age combine to produce a web of experiences shaping diversity among African-American women. As a result, it is more accurate to discuss of a *Black women's standpoint rather than a Black woman's standpoint*."<sup>19</sup> Every single person has unique experiences, and we will each one of us have our unique standpoints. Some people may share similar experiences, but not all. An African-American lesbian woman, for example, who was born into poverty and was sexually abused by her white stepfather, has very different experiences from a black middle class woman whose parents were highly educated and in

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<sup>19</sup> Collins 24.

prominent positions in the society and whose grandmother used to care for her when she was a child in the middle of a strong supportive black community. Both these women would still be subjected to the racism of the dominant culture, but they would have different tools to resist it coming from two different backgrounds. The problems that racism presents for them would most likely also be very different. Black women from other cultures would present an even wider variety of standpoints. An African woman may develop feminist consciousness, but she does not face racism the same way black American women do. A woman in Eritrea can well escape racism altogether. On the other hand, black South African women face racism in a worse form than African-American women. However, they do not seem to have a need to keep quiet about injustices directed toward them by their men in order to protect their men against white domination, in the way African-American women have done. It appears to me that Collins should extend her black women's *standpoint* to *black women's standpoints*.

Europeans have included most other ethnic groups in the European race, however there have been exceptions to this. Finns for instance were considered to belong to the Asian race as I have explained earlier. One could argue that because of colonialism and euro-centric attitudes, all black people are faced with racism regardless of whether they live in Nigeria, the Virgin Islands, Scandinavia or California. The African continent was not colonized because its citizens were black. Rather African peoples were defined as belonging to a different, black race as a result of imperialism and colonization. European

countries had colonies even in Europe. Finland for instance was first a Swedish colony and later on it became part of Russia.

In my opinion, the fact that Finns were classified as another race was precisely because of this colonial relationship to an European country, although linguistic difference also influenced this classification. Although Finns were described as having physical features similar to Asians, the physical differences between Finnish and the other Europeans are so minute that the race of the Finns could not have been disputed on the bases of physical characteristics.

Today race is not a recognized factor any longer. However, Finland still remains "the other" of Fenno-Scandia. All other Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) speak very similar languages. Finnish, on the other hand, is not even Indo-European. Culturally we also differ from our neighbors. Since the country is so small, and it has been part of Sweden and part of Russia, we have been influenced by West and East, although Finland's spiritual and intellectual heritage may derive more from the West than East as a result of the crusades. The Communist takeover of Russia intensified our need to identify with the West. The fact that we were not behind the iron curtain has not always been clear to the world. This has created an exaggerated need to be Western European. The fact of the matter is that Finland is not part of Western Europe in the same sense as England or France or Sweden. Regardless of how modern and advanced the society is, Finland remains on the outskirts of Europe. Previously colonized countries carry around the heritage of their history, regardless of whether the colonized

country is European, Asian or African. The difference between Finland and, for example, Senegal, is that since we do not physically differ considerably from our past oppressors, it is easier to assimilate and live with the false idea that we are part of them.

Gordon W. Allport in his book The Nature of Prejudice describes certain traits that he calls ego defenses. Allport explains that minorities tend to develop ego defenses in order to deal with the frustrations caused by the prejudices they are subjected to. Finnish people exhibit national characteristics that that can be described as ego defences. Finns often consider themselves to have low self-esteem. They believe themselves to lack ease and social grace, and they think of themselves as slow and backwards. Members of a minority group often pretend to agree with the dominant view of them in order to get on with life or sometimes only for revenge.<sup>20</sup> However, there are instances where oppressed people "instead of pretending to agree with his 'betters' actually does agree with them, and sees his own group through their eyes."<sup>21</sup> This I believe has been the case with the Finns. It is difficult to otherwise explain the hegemony that the 5% Swedish speaking minority still maintains over Finland.

Swedish is the second official language in Finland. When we consider the fact that Finnish is a very different kind of language and not useful beyond our borders, it seems irrational to spend time learning another language that is useful only in Scandinavia. Most of the time Finns accept Swedish without questioning. Two official languages are

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<sup>20</sup> Gordon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books 1958)146.

<sup>21</sup> Allport 147.

presented to the Finns as a "novelty" and valuable in itself. Learning Swedish is defended by statements like, "it is easier to learn another language, once you learn Swedish, an Indo-European language." This of course does not make any sense. Learning German or Spanish for example is not any easier after Swedish than it would be after having learned English. Maintaining Swedish schools even in areas where there are barely any Swedish speakers is defended by explaining how international and successful the students graduating from these schools are. Again, I don't see why attending a Swedish school would produce any more international students than going to an English school. If the students in the Swedish schools are more successful than those who graduate from Finnish schools, one should look at the reasons why this is, not start placing Finnish speaking children into Swedish schools.

How the history of the ethnic and racist oppression of the past still influences the lives of Finnish people and their attitudes about themselves is of course nothing compared to the severity of racism that African-American people are faced with in their everyday lives. Finnish people do not generally identify themselves as oppressed, or subjected to racism. However, as I have pointed out certain ego-defenses are still present. In general there is first of all a denial of the still present Swedish hegemony. Secondly, the subtle form of racist/ethnic oppression that they are faced with is internalized and therefore it is possible for the Swedish speakers to receive a disproportionate privileges. It seems to me that Finns should remind themselves of the old nationalist motto: "We are not Swedish and we will not become Russian. Let us be Finns!"

If Finnish women have developed at some level a minority consciousness, one could question why Black Feminist theory would reflect their reality. It could be possible that especially since Finnish people were considered Asian, Finnish women's feminist consciousness would be closer to that of Asian women. First of all, all minorities do share some commonalities. Therefore Finns could potentially relate to other minorities as well. However, there are other circumstances for which I would consider Finnish women to be closer to African-American women than to for example Asian women. Carla K. Bradshaw states in her article "Asian and Asian American Women: Historical and Political Considerations in Psychotherapy" that Asian female interests "may include focus on family rather than self, fatalism, obedience, inhibition, passivity, self-restraint, and adaptiveness." She explains that:

Other impediments to participation in feminism by Asian and Asian American women include the pervasive patriarchy within and without Asian communities. Within Asian communities and families, especially among ethnicities based on Confucian values, internal oppression includes prevailing values that overvalue men and boys, inhibition of female participation outside of one's own ethnic group.<sup>22</sup>

Although all women have been subjected to patriarchy, and over valuing of the male sex, there are differences in degrees and ways that it is manifested. A certain submissiveness that is expected from Asian and Asian-American women is not present in the role of African-American or Finnish women.

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<sup>22</sup> Carla K. Bradshaw, "Asian and Asian American Women: Historical and Political Considerations in Psychotherapy" *Women of Color*. ed. Comas-Diaz, Lillian and Beverly Greene. (New York & London: The Guildford Press, 1994) 93.



## ***Working women***

Both Finnish women and African-American women have engaged in paid labor out of necessity. Michele Wallace writes about the different conception of work held by white middle American middle class women and African-American women:

Before black women or white women said a word, there was a basic communication gap between them on this subject of work. When the middle-class white woman said "I want to work," in her head was a desk in the executive suite, while the black woman saw a bin of dirty clothes, someone else's dirty clothes. Something similar probably happened with the poor and lower-middle-class white woman. Her personal nightmare may have been a secretarial job or the kind of sales clerk job she had before she was married. When the white woman said, "Don't you want to work?" the black woman said, "Work? No thanks, I've already got more of that than I can use."<sup>23</sup>

Work has not brought emancipation for African-American women, and the same applies to Finnish women.

The role as a worker has also influenced gender roles. According to Staples, there has been more overlap between the gender roles among African-Americans than among other racial groups in the U.S. This first began during slavery when slave men were denied attributes of masculinity as providers and heads of their families.<sup>24</sup> Although emancipation gave African-American men more control over their personal lives, black men were denied the economic means of fulfilling their newly acquired (post-slavery)

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<sup>23</sup> Michele Wallace, Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman. (New York: Warner books, 1980) 180.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Staples, "Gender Roles and Male Sexism" Black Families at the Crossroads 122.

social role as provider and head of household. The scarcity of jobs for black men, however often forced the female to be the family provider, or at least substantially supplement the family income. Later women's role as a family provider among poor black women was further enhanced by welfare regulations that forced the men to leave their families in order for them to receive government assistance.<sup>25</sup> Being forced to carry on economic responsibilities in an egalitarian fashion led to a development of more egalitarian gender roles in Black families (as opposed to white families) explains Staples.<sup>26</sup>

In Finnish society flexibility in gender roles is a holdover from an agricultural past. On farms women were engaged in physically demanding labor. Although a division of labor between sexes was present, according to Markkola, women exhibited greater flexibility than men, in that women were expected to be able to carry on the male responsibilities if needed, while men were not expected to perform female labor.<sup>27</sup> This same one directional flexibility was present in the American slave communities.<sup>28</sup>

One could argue that in agricultural societies all over the world, women have performed their fair share of labor and therefore Finnish women are not in any special category in relation to their work load. In the case of Finnish women however, the transformation from an agricultural society into industrialized one was quick and happened

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<sup>25</sup> Staples 122.

<sup>26</sup> Staples 123.

<sup>27</sup> Pirjo Markkola, "Women in Rural Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries" The Lady with the Bow (Keuruu: Otava Publishers, 1990)21.

<sup>28</sup> Susan A. Mann, "Slavery & Sharecropping" Black Women in America. ed. Malson, Mudimbe-Boyi and Wyer O'Barr (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) 139.

late compared to other Western countries.<sup>29</sup> As a result, Finnish women went from the fields to the factories. Although the idea that women should stay home and take care of the family was accepted, in reality this was possible only for a few Finnish women. As a result, women's role was not only as caretaker, but also as family provider. In a similar manner, black women desired to be able to commit themselves to full-time motherhood but were denied the means to do it.

There have been many working class women of all races in the same situation. It is possible that white working class women in the U.S. resemble their Finnish and African-American sisters in this respect. Nellie Y. McKay writes, "Women of color, lesbians, and poor and working-class women always knew they were different from white heterosexual middle-class women, and that their differences made them socially inferior and subordinate to that group. Conversely, white heterosexual middle-class women took advantage of the privilege of their superior position to marginalize and oppress other women."<sup>30</sup> However, the difference between the situation in the U.S. and in Finland was that while most Finnish women were poor and working class, although many white women in the U.S. were poor, many were not. Unlike in Finland, the number of working class women in the U.S. was too small to influence what was considered the role of women by the popular culture. Therefore Finnish middle-class women were not able to marginalize and oppress other women to the extent American middle-class women could.

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<sup>29</sup> Markkola 21.

<sup>30</sup> McKay 272.

The reality of the working mother became a norm in the Finnish society and the possibility of staying home a privilege. In a similar manner, although some middle class African-American women could enjoy being a full-time mothers, they could not take this for granted, and the majority of black women had to work outside the home.

As African-American women have been denied the joys of full-time motherhood first by slavery and later by economic hardship, black women's attitudes about mothering have been influenced differently from middle class white women in the U.S. During slavery black women were forced to procreate and were not allowed to fulfill their duties as mothers. Later some black women were subjected to forced sterilizations.<sup>31</sup> This was bound to influence the value black women place on being mothers.

Second wave feminists found motherhood a confinement. Dependency on a male provider was considered to restrict one's self expression and fulfillment of one's potential.<sup>32</sup> Work had not brought emancipation for black women nor Finnish women, and self expression was not searched for in the labor market. Being forced to search for outside paid labor often forced working mothers, because of the lack of daycare, to leave their children to questionable care or without any adult supervision at all. Although the attitude about what kind of responsibilities to place on a child at different ages varies from culture to culture, it is difficult to imagine that a Finnish mother who was forced to leave

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31 Beverly Smith, "Black Women's Health: Notes for a Course" in *But Some of Us are Brave*. ed. Hull, Bell Scott, Smith (New York: The Feminist Press, 1992)105.

32 Jeffner Allen, *Lesbian Philosophy: Explorations* (Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1986) 63.

her 3 year old home alone for an entire work day without proper care believed that 3 year olds are old enough to care for themselves.

Being able to care for one's children has probably influenced the acceptance of women's responsibility to be both caretakers and providers. In Finland this is today further enhanced by the societal structure that makes it possible to be both. Finnish women are not faced with a choice to either be mothers or have a career to the same extent that American women are. As a result they have not questioned their unequal share of parental responsibilities in the way white American feminists have. And they have not seen motherhood as an annihilation in a same manner as some radical feminists in the U.S., such as Jeffner Allen.

Since motherhood has not annihilated African-American women or Finnish women and outside paid labor has not brought emancipation as white American feminists assumed, women's self-consciousness has been differently formed. Although in some ways African-American and Finnish women have been further oppressed for they did not have a choice in being full-time mothers or career women, even when the choice became available for middle class white women in America, they have been aware of their strengths and abilities in a different way. They have been able, in some restricted sense, to fulfill their potential in a wider area than those whose only option was being a mother. They have been forced to rely on themselves in a different way from white American middle class women. Therefore they have been forced to develop more autonomously,

without really desiring autonomy. In Finland women's autonomy has been further enhanced by social policies of the welfare state.

"The emphasis of the women's movement on eradicating the helpless female stereotype has a different meaning for White women than it has for Black women. The image has a debilitating effect for White women; rejecting it and ultimately eradicating it is necessary for the structuring of new self-images," writes Gloria I. Joseph in "White Promotion, Black Survival."<sup>33</sup> The helpless female stereotype has never been applicable to Finnish women. The stereotypes of Black women depict them as strong "mules of the world" to use Zora Neale Hurston's words.<sup>34</sup> Joseph articulates the extent of this stereotype well. "While many people," she writes, "would consider certain menial, laborious jobs as being 'unfit for women,' they fail to notice if Black women hold them. The jobs may be unfit for women , but not for Black women."<sup>35</sup>

Neither black women nor Finnish women have fit the Western stereotype of a woman as weak, helpless and dependent. As the Western ideal of womanhood has prevailed in the U.S., black women's very womanhood has been placed under question. In Finland most women did not fit the stereotype, so it is questionable whether this has even been an issue. The group of women who actually fit the stereotype in Finland has been so small as to possibly not have effected the desirable image of women at all. In

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<sup>33</sup> Gloria I. Joseph, "White Promotion, Black Survival" Common Differences, ed. Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis (Boston: South End Press, 1981) 28.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph 28.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph 28.

other words Finnish women and men may have been completely content with females being strong and capable, rather than weak and helpless. Therefore there may not have been any contradiction present as to how a woman is supposed to be. However, it is also possible that the Western ideal was accepted, but could not be. Mothers in the work force was supposed to be a temporary state in the development of the country. Eventually when economic straits eased, women anticipated that they would stop working outside the home. This is parallel to women entering the industrial work force during World War II in the U.S. to replace men who had entered the military. In Finland however, women in labor force was not tied to the war time. Women worked before the war and continued to work after the war was over. Women may not have been considered strong, but out of necessity demanding tasks were unfairly expected of them. Women in Finland may in fact have not have felt particularly feminine. On the other hand, it is also possible that Western feminine attributes were not valued in Finland since they did not serve the needs of the country. In this case women would have had no conflict in being women and maintaining qualities that in western eyes were deemed masculine.

### ***Myth of a Strong Woman***

Being able to engage in often physically demanding labor and take care of one's family have contributed to the conception of a "strong woman." Political activity, such as black women in the civil rights movement or Finnish women in government, has also perpetuated the image of a strong woman.

Michele Wallace writes about the image of black woman in Black Macho and the

Myth of the Super Woman:

From the intricate web of mythology which surrounds the black woman, a fundamental image emerges. It is of a woman of inordinate strength, with an ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy, distasteful work. This woman does not have the same fears, weakness', and insecurities as other women, but believes herself to be and is, in fact, stronger emotionally than most men. Less of a woman in that she is less "feminine" and helpless, she is really *more of a woman in that she is the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves. In other words, she is a superwoman.*<sup>36</sup>

African-American women have been accused of creating the problems that black men face. The black family has been considered to be matriarchal, where the female holds the power. By her power she has supposedly emasculated the black man, and therefore it is her fault that the black man is having problems in contemporary society. This is a view presented by the infamous Moynihan report in 1965. Instead of blaming racism, the problem is thus conveniently blamed on black women. Even if the black woman held more power in her own community, it would be wrong to assume that this would emasculate the black man and cause him to be incapable of taking responsibility. If in fact he felt emasculated, the fault would still rely on the sexist and racist ideology of the dominant society, because it would be only in relation to the masculine image of the

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<sup>36</sup> Wallace 154.



dominant culture that the black man would be feeling emasculated. Besides the power of the black woman is highly questionable. Michele Wallace writes:

...the black woman , who is at the white woman's knees, under the black man's heel, and gets the back of the white man's hand, he [Eldridge Cleaver] described as an Amazon. Didn't he realize that Amazon meant female warrior? What warrior would have put up with that kind of abuse?<sup>37</sup>

When Finnish women gained 38% of the seats in the parliament, the government was called "a petticoat (lingerie) government." This was to indicate the power (too much) held by the female sex, and insinuate the negative consequences. (A country run by those who were petticoats would surely lead to a disaster).

The bottom line is that the "Myth of the Strong Nordic Woman" and the "Myth of the Strong Black Woman" have grown out of a comparison to the accepted Western norm. Women were not supposed to work other than for their husband and children, according to the Western ideal, or be able to survive without men, voice her opinions, or change rules and regulations. The women who have actually done this must be especially strong and their men must not be real men.

Images of strong women have been perpetuated in Finland through literature. Katriina by Sally Salminen is one example where woman is depicted as being able to handle anything.

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<sup>37</sup> Wallace 168.

Katriina was the daughter of a landowner from Northern Ostrobothnia. She was the oldest of three sisters, and she was also merriest, proudest and the most beautiful of her sisters. Strong was her young erect body. Working was like play for her, whether cutting wood in the forest, plowing or harrowing in the fields, or spinning or knitting in the house.<sup>38</sup>

This is how Salminen begins her book describing Katriina, the heroine. Katriina marries a sailor from Ahvenanmaa. Her husband turns out to be a spineless crofter -- instead of a land owner he claimed to be -- who by deceit had married her. Katriina accepts her fate and faces her struggles with enormous strength. She takes care of herself, her children and her husband. She stands up for herself against the landowners regardless of whether they try take advantage of her sexually or economically and does not give in to despair in the face of her husband's shortcomings. In other words, Katriina is quite a super woman.

A real life superwoman is illustrated in an autobiography of Bertta Valtonen. Bertta was born at the turn of the century and became a midwife. Her stories describe her work as a midwife for over 40 years in developing Finland. She manifests incredible strength, resourcefulness and spirit. Besides being a midwife, Bertta is also a wife and a mother. However, due to her job she is often forced to be apart from her husband.<sup>39</sup> I find it remarkable (and also typical for Finnish women) that in her struggles she does not hide her fears, but she faces them. Men are often expected to not be afraid, and thus are forced to hide their fearful feelings, but women are more able to exhibit the full range of

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<sup>38</sup> Sally Salminen, Katriina 1936 (Keuruu: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otavan Laakapaino, 1971) (My translation)

<sup>39</sup> Bertta Valtonen, Kätilönä Karjalassa (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1985)

their emotions. However, women in Finland are still expected to get a hold of themselves and do what needs to be done, while it appears to me that the traditional Western stereotype of women allows women to give into their fears.

Kaari Utrio is another Finnish author who depicts women as strong willed, proud and clever. She is a popular author, who writes love stories based on true historical surroundings. Her women are usually also sexually very active. This is contrary to the Western ideal woman, who is expected to be prudent and chaste.

The myth of a strong Finnish women was created by the real life circumstances where women have been forced to handle it all and later social policies have made it possible for women to continue doing it all -- the image that is further perpetuated in the literature.

## ***Sexism***

According to Staples, African-Americans hold on to more traditional family values, while exhibiting more egalitarian gender roles than whites.<sup>40</sup> In other words egalitarian behavior has, in the Black community, resulted from circumstances rather than changing values. For example, even if a black woman wants to be a full-time mother, she often cannot. As a result sexist behavior is often accepted or at least tolerated.

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<sup>40</sup> Staples 131.

The same division between gender roles seems to hold true for Finnish women. Regardless of the fact that women are better educated, they still earn less money than men. The job market is also heavily sex stratified, and men hold a larger share of the better paying jobs. Women are actively involved in all areas of society, yet they hold the main responsibility for child care and household work. Women, although strongly represented in politics, have been unable to do much to abolish spousal abuse. Sexual harassment at work is common. Women are often demeaned and undermined, and supposedly feminine characteristics are considered degrading not only for men, but for women as well.

Black women have suffered sexism, and still do, first of all as members of the patriarchal dominant society, and second in their own community. The American slavery system provides a good example of this. It was a patriarchal capitalist institution, controlled by privileged white men. The owner of the slaves had the access to abuse slave women any way he desired, be that economic exploitation or sexual abuse. Sexual abuse of slave women has been construed as an atrocity directed to females only. According to Harriet Jacobs, slave women suffered oppression unique to their gender.<sup>41</sup> Angela Y. Davis makes the same point:

Where work was concerned, strength and productivity under the threat of the whip outweighed considerations of sex. In this sense, the oppression of women was identical to the oppression of men. But women suffered in

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<sup>41</sup> Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in a Life of a Slave Girl*, *Early African-American Classics* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990) 177.

different ways as well, for they were victims of sexual abuse and other barbarous mistreatment that could only be inflicted on women.<sup>42</sup>

Although men also were sexually abused during slavery, men have not discussed this form of abuse as differentiated from other abuse they suffered. The fact that women often became pregnant as a result of the abuse has probably been the main reason why women have considered sexual abuse a special form of abuse. Besides suffering pregnancy and childbirth, women lacked control of the fate of their children and they were denied a right to fulfill their role as mothers. It is true that slave men were denied the right to their children as well, but the dominant society viewed women's primary role to be mothers. On one hand the system forced slave women into motherhood and on the other it denied them the right to act according to the role. At the time men's primary duty was to provide for their families, which was denied to slave men. However, this does not directly link to sexual abuse as in the case of women.

After emancipation African-Americans gained the right to self determination. However, they still lacked social and political power to protect themselves from the continued abuse and exploitation from the white people. Rape of women still continued without consequences. While women have been raped with minimal consequences to the rapist until recently, white men have been in a better position than black men to protect their women from rape due to unfair legal practices. Susan A. Mann writes:

...inadequate legal protection of Black rape victims is reflected in the fact that "from emancipation through more than two-thirds of the twentieth century, no Southern white male was convicted of raping or attempting to

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<sup>42</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Women Race & Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) 6.

rape a Black women" despite the knowledge that this crime was widespread.<sup>43</sup>

The racist and sexist society has formed various mythical images of black women. "There is Jezebel (the seductive temptress), Sapphire (the evil, manipulative bitch), or Aunt Jemima (the sexless, long-suffering nurturer)," writes Cornel West.<sup>44</sup> These images, according to West are born out of the fear of black sexuality. Black men are also influenced by the sexist attitudes of the dominant society. If white man is the norm of masculinity, anything deviant from the ways of white men is seen as effeminate. Robert Staples presents a good example of this in his book, Black Families at the Crossroads:

One widely quoted study found Black males scored higher on the femininity index of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test. Their femininity score was higher than that of White males, because they were more likely to agree with statements such as "I would like to be a singer" and "I think I feel more intensely than most people do"<sup>45</sup>

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test, writes Staples, has been used as evidence to show that there is a high ratio of latent homosexuals among black men.<sup>46</sup> To misconstrue test answers in this manner shows that a researcher is homophobic, racist, and/or sexist. It is sexist to decide that certain personality traits are gender based, when the differences could be cultural. It is racist to use one ethnic/racial

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<sup>43</sup> Mann, Susan A., "Slavery and Sharecropping", *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 4, Summer 1989 ([Deborah Gray White's *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985)] [W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 1860-1880 (New York: Atheneum, 1975, 670-728]

<sup>44</sup> Cornel West, Race Matters (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 190.

<sup>45</sup> Staples 125-126.

<sup>46</sup> Staples 126.

group as the norm for these traits, and it is homophobic to argue that men with supposedly feminine characteristics would be homosexuals.

Sexism toward black men within the white society will have implications for the females too. First of all, as I have mentioned earlier, black women have been blamed for emasculating black men. Secondly, the pressure for black men to fit the standard of manhood has created a need for black men to internalize certain sexist values. On the other hand, since the dominant culture has seriously hindered black men from achieving the status as men according to the criteria put forward by the dominant culture, an over exaggerated need to prove oneself a man may have taken place.

The Black Panther Party provides blatant examples of sexist attitudes toward females, as well as male machismo. The following episode is from Elaine Brown's autobiographical book, A Taste for Power:

"This here is Sister Marsha," Bobby [Seale] said. "I want you to meet her. Although she's a young Sister, she's got a full grown dedication to this party. That's why she's the only Sister on a security squad. She's one of the toughest Sisters in the party..."

"Marsha, tell the Sister here what a Brother has to do to get some [sex] from you," Bobby commanded.

Marsha was child, maybe fifteen years old. ....she spoke like a Brother.

She stood at attention. "First of all, a Brother's got to be righteous. He's got to be a Panther. He's got to be able to recite the ten-point platform and program, and be ready to off the pig and die for the People."

"Right on, Sister Marsha!" the Brothers shouted.

"Can't no motherfucker get no pussy from me unless he can get down with the party," she added without prompting.

"Right on!" they responded again.

"And what's a Sister got to do?" Bobby pushed.

"A Sister has to learn to shoot as well as to cook, and be ready to back up the Brothers. A Sister's got to know the ten-point platform and program by heart."

"And what else?" Bobby urged.

*"A Sister has to give up the pussy when the Brother is on his job and hold it back when he's not. 'Cause Sisters got pussy power."*<sup>47</sup> (italics mine)

In this incident a young brain-washed girl is asked to recite the duties of men and women in the party in order to entertain the Brothers in the room and show Elaine Brown what are the right attitudes for a Panther woman to hold. Many sexist attitudes were commonly held within the Party. Women were considered to be subservient to men, women were used as sex objects, women were to have "babies for the revolution." Violence within the Party was common among men, and women were very often subjects of physical abuse.

Regardless of the sexist attitudes, Elaine was the acting chair person of the Party when Huey Newton was in exile in Cuba. She was accepted as the leader because of Newton's orders and with the brutal aid of some Newton's supporters. However, she was the most powerful person for a period of time. It seems paradoxical to hold very chauvinist ideas and yet submit to the leadership and intelligence of one who represents the subject of those ideas.

This same paradox is prevalent in Finland. Women hold leadership positions, and the attitude is more that of toleration of their sex. It appears that women can be good at any particular task, regardless of their sex. Even such traditionally masculine positions as Minister of Defense have been held by a female. Yet women are despised for their sex. The paradox between chauvinist attitudes and trust in women's abilities is curious.

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<sup>47</sup> Elaine Brown, A Taste of Power (New York: Anchor Books, 1994) 189.



“Change has not penetrated all social structures: men still hold more leadership positions, they work less, but earn more than women,” write Näre and Heinämaa.<sup>48</sup> With economic hardship threatening the Finland those social benefits that are important to women are deemed questionable, and consequently women’s place in society is under question as well.

The Black Panther Party only serves as an extreme example of sexism within the African-American community. Ordinary women, however, have not escaped sexism either. Values held by the dominant society regarding woman's subservience were commonly accepted by black sharecroppers. According to Susan Mann, research indicates that "it was normative behavior for Black women slaves and sharecroppers to accept male domestic authority."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore she claims that "historical evidence suggests that wife and child abuse by Black husbands was prevalent under both slavery and sharecropping."<sup>50</sup> Even today, as I mentioned earlier, research indicates conflict between values held and reality.

In Finland family violence is a common problem and in most cases the abused is the woman. Women talk about battery and warn one another, but much is not done to correct this form of injustice. There is no open discussion on the subject, which is considered private and a family matter. (When I as a 18 year old young woman was living with my fiancée, I remember having tried to consciously aggravate him to hit me so that I

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<sup>48</sup> Sara Heinämaa and Näre, Sari, Pahan Tyttäret (Tampere: Gaudeamus, 1994) 5

<sup>49</sup> Mann 146.

<sup>50</sup> Mann 148.

would know if he would do that. I wanted to find it out. I did not grow up around violence, but it was so common that even I had a need to find out if I was in danger of it.) Marita Husso writes about Finnish spousal abuse: "To speak about spousal abuse does not fit well with the commonly held understanding that Finnish women have achieved societal position that is one of the best in the world. Lack of statistics and information about violence toward women indicates attitudes that advocate covering up and holding in secrecy the whole issue."<sup>51</sup>(my translation)

The same controversy about the images of strong and egalitarian women as objects of physical abuse that the Finns face holds true for black women. Added to this is the fact that Black women have a special problem reporting violence to police. By searching for help from the justice system the black woman is faced with the dilemma of whether she is perpetuating the myth of black men as violent or not.

Racism has forced black women into a position where they have been reluctant to embrace feminist ideology. Feminism has been seen as a white women's movement. Internal racism in the movement and lack of understanding for the special circumstances of the women of color have certainly not helped to include black women in it. However, part of the reluctance has arisen from the dilemma between struggle against racism versus the struggle against sexism.

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<sup>51</sup> Marita Husso. "Parisuhdeväkivalta ja pahoinpidelty ruumis" Heinämaa & Näre 130.

Expressing ideas against sexism has often been construed as expressing ideas against men. For black women specifically this has meant that they would be abandoning their men in the fight against racism. bell hooks writes:

Often the history of our struggle as black people is made synonymous with the efforts of black males to have patriarchal power and privilege. As one black woman college student put it, "In order to redeem the race we have to redeem black manhood." If such redemption means creating a society in which black men assume the stereotypical male role of provider and head of household, then sexism is seen not as destructive but as essential to the promotion and maintenance of the black family.<sup>52</sup>

Black women have been told that they don't need feminism, that they are not oppressed by men other than white men, and that this will be taken care of by fighting for civil rights. To ask for their concerns as women to be heard has been viewed as turning against their black brothers. Finnish women have not been fighting for civil rights, but they too have been told that feminism is not for them. Finnish women are equal, and the only ones who still complain are some bitter women who haven't found a man.

### ***Women Protective of Men***

Although much of the controversy between civil rights and women's rights is imagined, there are some special cases that black women need to consider. As I mentioned earlier, black women are faced with a special kind of problem when they need

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<sup>52</sup> bell hooks, Talking Back, Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black (Boston: South End Press, 1989) 178.

to confront their physically abusive men. In contacting the police to gain help for the situation a black woman maybe feel that she is contributing to the myth of black men as violent, although the man actually is behaving violently. The current legal system however, is still ravaged with racism. Therefore mistrust toward the system is common within black community.

Struggling against racism with men gives black women insight into the special problems that black men face. Often an understanding of these problems causes women to tolerate sexism from men. Finnish women also seem to be protective of men. Regardless of the political power they hold, they tend to emphasize that the issues they are working for are for the cause of humanity, not for women's benefit. Why would Finnish women try to take Finnish men into consideration? Although Finnish women, like black women, were never on the pedestal, it seems that nobody else was on the pedestal either. It may be true that Finnish women did not have women among them who would fit on the pedestal, they still had accepted the Western norm of womanhood. Therefore somebody was on the pedestal, it just wasn't she. Otherwise, there would not be a conflict between the values and the reality. If society had accepted the view of a woman according to the Western standard, this seems to imply that men were supposed to strive toward the masculine ideal of Western world as well. The whole idea that the Nordic welfare system is based on a "weak male provider" speaks for this view. If the Finnish woman was planning to work only as long as her husband could not provide for the family, the Finnish man must have hoped one day to fulfill his role as a sole provider. He has miserably failed

in this. It is true that today most women would not want to give up their careers, but it is also true, that even today in a Finnish welfare state, a man's income often would not support an entire family. Combined with values that lag behind the reality, it is possible that Finnish women are more tolerant of men's arrogance and chauvinism, because they are sensitive to the history of gender roles.

### ***Conclusion***

Although Finnish women's experiences differ enormously from African-American women, I believe that there are enough similarities for Finnish women to greatly benefit from looking at their own history from the perspective that Black Feminist theory offers. Combining the effects of sexism, racism, and economic oppression and looking at the influence that this combination has on one's feminist consciousness is important and revealing.

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